DATE DUE

Property of)
FAMILY OF FAITH
LIBRARY

Property of
FAMILY OF FAITH
LIBRARY

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

https://archive.org/details/expositorsbiblep0015wrob

THE EXPOSITOR'S BIBLE

EDITED BY THE REV

W. ROBERTSON NICOLL, M.A., LL.D.

Editor of "The Expositor"

AUTHORIZED EDITION, COMPLETE
AND UNABRIDGED
BOUND IN TWENTY-SIX VOLUMES

NEW YORK
A. C. ARMSTRONG AND SON
3 and 5 West Eighteenth Street
London: Hodder and Stoughton
1908

THE PSALMS

BY
ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D.D

VOLUME I.
PSALMS I.—XXXVIII.

NEW YORK
A. C. ARMSTRONG AND SON
3 & 5 WEST 18th STREET, NEAR 5th AVENUE
1908

Family of Faith Library

PREFACE.

A VOLUME which appears in "The Expositor's Bible" should obviously, first of all, be expository. I have tried to conform to that requirement, and have therefore found it necessary to leave questions of date and authorship all but untouched. They could not be adequately discussed in conjunction with Exposition. I venture to think that the deepest and most precious elements in the Psalms are very slightly affected by the answers to these questions, and that expository treatment of the bulk of the Psalter may be separated from critical, without condemning the former to incompleteness. If I have erred in thus restricting the scope of this volume, I have done so after due consideration; and am not without hope that the restriction may commend itself to some readers.

A. McL.

MANCHESTER, *Dec.* 1892.

CONTENTS.

		PAGE
PSALM	I.	1
„	II.	11
„	III.	23
„	IV.	30
„	V.	37
„	VI.	49
„	VII.	57
„	VIII.	68
„	IX.	77
„	X.	89
„	XI.	101
„	XII.	109
„	XIII.	117
„	XIV.	123
„	XV.	132
„	XVI.	140
„	XVII.	150
„	XVIII.	163
„	XIX.	186

PAGE

PSALM XX. 195
" XXI. 201
" XXII. 208
" XXIII. 226
" XXIV. 233
" XXV. 240
" XXVI. 251
" XXVII. 258
" XXVIII. 268
" XXIX. 273
" XXX. 280
" XXXI. 289
" XXXII. 302
" XXXIII. 311
" XXXIV. 320
" XXXV. 332
" XXXVI. 344
" XXXVII. 356
" XXXVIII. 375

PSALM I.

1 Happy the man who has not walked in the counsel of the wicked,
And has not stood in the way of sinners,
And in the session of scorners has not sat.
2 But in the law of Jehovah [is] his delight,
And in His law he meditates day and night.
3 And he is like a tree planted by the runnels of water,
Which yields its fruit in its season,
And whose leafage does not fade,
And all which he does he prosperously accomplishes.
4 Not so are the wicked,
But like chaff which the wind drives away.
5 Therefore the wicked shall not stand in the judgment,
Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.
6 For Jehovah knows the righteous,
And the way of the wicked shall perish.

THE Psalter may be regarded as the heart's echo to the speech of God, the manifold music of its wind-swept strings as God's breath sweeps across them. Law and Prophecy are the two main elements of that speech, and the first two psalms, as a double prelude to the book, answer to these, the former setting forth the blessedness of loving and keeping the law, and the latter celebrating the enthronement of Messiah. Jewish tradition says that they were originally one, and a well-attested reading of Acts xiii. 33 quotes "Thou art my Son" as part of "the first Psalm." The diversity of subject makes original unity improbable, but possibly our present first Psalm was prefixed unnumbered.

Its theme, the blessedness of keeping the law, is enforced by the juxtaposition of two sharply contrasted pictures, one in bright light, another in deep shadow, and each heightening the other. Ebal and Gerizim face one another.

The character and fate of the lover of the law are sketched in vv. 1-3, and that of the "wicked" in vv. 4-6.

"How abundantly is that word Blessed multiplied in the Book of Psalms! The book seems to be made out of that word, and the foundation raised upon that word, for it is the first word of the book. But in all the book there is not one Woe" (Donne).

It is usually taken as an exclamation, but may equally well be a simple affirmation, and declares a universal truth even more strongly, if so regarded. The characteristics which thus bring blessedness are first described negatively, and that order is significant. As long as there is so much evil in the world, and society is what it is, godliness must be largely negative, and its possessors "a people whose laws are different from all people that be on earth." Live fish swim against the stream; dead ones go with it.

The tender graces of the devout soul will not flourish unless there be a wall of close-knit and unparticipating opposition round them, to keep off nipping blasts. The negative clauses present a climax, notwithstanding the unquestionable correctness of one of the grounds on which that has been denied—namely, the practical equivalence of "wicked" and "sinner."

Increasing closeness and permanence of association are obvious in the progress from *walking* to *standing* and from standing to *sitting*. Increasing boldness in evil is marked by the progress from *counsel* to *way*, or

course of life, and thence to *scoffing*. Evil purposes come out in deeds, and deeds are formularised at last in bitter speech. Some men scoff because they have already sinned. The tongue is blackened and made sore by poison in the system. Therefore goodness will avoid the smallest conformity with evil, as knowing that if the hem of the dress or the tips of the hair be caught in the cruel wheels, the whole body will be drawn in. But these negative characteristics are valuable mainly for their efficacy in contributing to the positive, as the wall round a young plantation is there for the sake of what grows behind it. On the other hand, these positive characteristics, and eminently that chief one of a higher love, are the only basis for useful abstinence. Mere conventional, negative virtue is of little power or worth unless it flow from a strong set of the soul in another direction.

"So did not I" is good and noble when we can go on to say, as Nehemiah did, "because of the fear of God." The true way of floating rubbish out is to pour water in. Delight in the law will deliver from delight in the counsel of the wicked. As the negative, so the positive begins with the inward man. The main thing about all men is the direction of their "delight." Where do tastes run? what pleases them most? and where are they most at ease? Deeds will follow the current of desires, and be right if the hidden man of the heart be right. To the psalmist, that law was revealed by Pentateuch and prophets; but the delight in it, in which he recognises the germ of godliness, is the coincidence of will and inclination with the declared will of God, however declared. In effect, he reduces perfection to the same elements as the other psalmist who sang, "I delight to do Thy will, yea, Thy law is

within my heart." The secret of blessedness is self-renunciation,—

> "A love to lose my will in His,
> And by that loss be free."

Thoughts which are sweet will be familiar.

The command to Joshua is the instinct of the devout man. In the distractions and activities of the busy day the law beloved will be with him, illuminating his path and shaping his acts. In hours of rest it will solace weariness and renew strength. That habit of patient, protracted brooding on the revelation of God's will needs to be cultivated. Men live meanly because they live so fast. Religion lacks depth and volume because it is not fed by hidden springs.

The good man's character being thus all condensed into one trait, the psalm next gathers his blessedness up in one image. The tree is an eloquent figure to Orientals, who knew water as the one requisite to turn desert into garden. Such a life as has been sketched will be rooted and steadfast. "Planted" is expressed by a word which suggests fixity. The good man's life is deeply anchored, and so rides out storms. It goes down through superficial fleeting things to that Eternal Will, and so stands unmoved and upright when winds howl. Scotch firs lift massive, corrugated boles, and thrust out wide, gnarled branches clothed in steadfast green, and look as if they could face any tempest, but their roots run laterally among the surface gravel, and therefore they go down before blasts which feeble saplings, that strike theirs vertically, meet unharmed.

Such a life is fed and refreshed. The law of the Lord is at once soil and stream. In the one aspect fastening a life to it gives stability; in the other,

freshening and means of growth. Truly loved, that Will becomes, in its manifold expressions, as the divided irrigation channels through which a great river is brought to the roots of each plant. If men do not find it life-giving as rivers of water in a dry place, it is because they do not delight in it. Opposed, it is burdensome and harsh; accepted, this sweet image tells what it becomes—the true good, the only thing that really nourishes and reinvigorates. The disciples came back to Jesus, whom they had left too wearied and faint to go with them to the city, and found Him fresh and strong. Their wonder was answered by, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me."

Such a life is vigorous and productive. It would be artificial straining to assign definite meanings to "fruit" and "leaf." All that belongs to vigorous vitality and beauty is included. These come naturally when the preceding condition is fulfilled. This stage of the psalm is the appropriate place for deeds to come into view. By loving fellowship with God and delight in His law the man is made capable of good. His virtues are growths, the outcome of life. The psalm anticipates Christ's teaching of the good tree bringing forth good fruit, and also tells how His precept of making the tree good is to be obeyed—namely, by transplanting it from the soil of self-will to that of delight in the law. How that transplanting is to be effected it does not tell. "But now being made free from sin, and become servants of God, ye have your fruit unto holiness," and the fruit of the Spirit in "whatsoever things are lovely and of good report" hangs in clusters on the life that has been shifted from the realm of darkness and rooted in Christ. The relation is more intimate still. "I am the vine, ye are the branches.

He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit."

Such a life will be prosperous. The figure is abandoned here. The meaning is not affected whether we translate "whatsoever he doeth shall prosper," or "whatsoever . . . he shall cause to succeed." That is not unconditionally true now, nor was it then, if referred to what the world calls prospering, as many a sad and questioning strain in the Psalter proves. He whose life is rooted in God will have his full share of foiled plans and abortive hopes, and will often see the fruit nipped by frost or blown green from the boughs, but still the promise is true in its inmost meaning. For what is prosperity? Does the psalmist merely mean to preach the more vulgar form of the doctrine that religion makes the best of both worlds? or are his hopes to be harmonised with experience, by giving a deeper meaning to "prosperity"? They to whom the will of God is delight can never be hurt by evil, for all that meets them expresses and serves that will, and the fellow-servants of the King do not wound one another. If a life be rooted in God and a heart delight in His law, that life will be prosperous and that heart will be at rest.

The second half of the psalm gives the dark contrast of the fruitless, rootless life (vv. 4-6). The Hebrew flashes the whole dread antithesis on the view at once by its first word, "Not so," a universal negative, which reverses every part of the preceding picture. "Wicked" is preferable to "ungodly," as the designation of the subjects. Whether we take the root idea of the word to be "restless," as most of the older and many modern commentators do, or "crooked" (Hupfeld), or "loose, flaccid" (Delitzsch), it is the opposite of "righteous," and

therefore means one who lives not by the law of God, but by his own will. The psalmist has no need to describe him further nor to enumerate his deeds. The fundamental trait of his character is enough. Two classes only, then, are recognised here. If a man has not God's uttered will for his governor, he goes into the category of "wicked." That sounds harsh doctrine, and not corresponding to the innumerable gradations of character actually seen. But it does correspond to facts, if they are grasped in their roots of motive and principle. If God be not the supreme delight, and His law sovereign, some other object is men's delight and aim, and that departure from God taints a life, however fair it may be. It is a plain deduction from our relations to God that lives lived irrespective of Him are sinful, whatever be their complexion otherwise.

The remainder of the psalm has three thoughts—the real nullity of such lives, their consequent disappearance in "the judgment," and the ground of both the blessedness of the one type of character and the vanishing of the other in the diverse attitude of God to each. Nothing could more vividly suggest the essential nothingness of the "wicked" than the contrast of the leafy beauty of the fruit-laden tree and the chaff, rootless, fruitless, lifeless, light, and therefore the sport of every puff of wind that blows across the elevated and open threshing floor.

Such is indeed a true picture of every life not rooted in God and drawing fertility from Him. It is rootless; for what hold-fast is there but in Him? or where shall the heart twine its tendrils if not round God's stable throne? or what basis do fleeting objects supply for him who builds elsewhere than on the enduring Rock?

It is fruitless; for what is fruit? There may be much activity and many results satisfying to part of man's nature and admired by others. One fruit there will be, in character elaborated. But if we ask what ought to be the products of a life, man and God being what they are in themselves and to each other, we shall not wonder if every result of godless energy is regarded by "those clear eyes and perfect judgment" of heaven as barrenness. In the light of these higher demands, achievements hymned by the world's acclamations seem infinitely small, and many a man, rich in the apparent results of a busy and prosperous life, will find to his dismayed astonishment that he has nothing to show but unfruitful works of darkness. Chaff is fruitless because lifeless.

Its disappearance in the winnowing wind is the consequence and manifestation of its essential nullity. "Therefore" draws the conclusion of necessary transiency. Just as the winnower throws up his shovel full into the breeze, and the chaff goes fluttering out of the floor because it is light, while the wheat falls on the heap because it is solid, so the wind of judgment will one day blow and deal with each man according to his nature. It will separate them, whirling away the one, and not the other. "One shall be taken and the other left." When does this sifting take effect? The psalmist does not date it. There is a continually operative law of retribution, and there are crises of individual or national life, when the accumulated consequences of evil deeds fall on the doers. But the definite article prefixed to "judgment" seems to suggest some special "day" of separation. It is noteworthy and perhaps illuminative that John the Baptist uses the same figures of the tree and the chaff in his picture of

the Messianic judgments, and that epoch may have been in the psalmist's mind. Whatever the date, this he is sure of—that the wind will rise some time, and that, when it does, the wicked will be blown out of sight. When the judgment comes, the "congregation of the righteous"—that is, the true Israel within Israel, or, to speak in Christian language, the true invisible Church—will be freed from admixture of outward adherents, whose lives give the lie to their profession. Men shall be associated according to spiritual affinity, and "being let go," will "go to their own company" and "place," wherever that may be.

The ground of these diverse fates is the different attitude of God to each life. Each clause of the last verse really involves two ideas, but the pregnant brevity of style states only half of the antithesis in each, suppressing the second member in the first clause and the first member in the second clause, and so making the contrast the more striking by emphasising the cause of an unspoken consequence in the former, and the opposite consequence of an unspoken cause in the latter. "The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous [therefore it shall last]. The Lord knoweth not the way of the wicked [therefore it shall perish]." The way which the Lord knows abides. "Know" is, of course, here used in its full sense of loving knowledge, care, and approval, as in "He knoweth my path" and the like sayings. The direction of the good man's life is watched, guarded, approved, and blessed by God. Therefore it will not fail to reach its goal. They who walk patiently in the paths which He has prepared will find them paths of peace, and will not tread them unaccompanied, nor ever see them diverging from the straight road to home and rest. "Commit thy way

unto the Lord," and let His way be thine, and He shall make thy way prosperous.

The way or course of life which God does not know perishes. A path perishes when, like some dim forest track, it dies out, leaving the traveller bewildered amid impenetrable forests, or when, like some treacherous Alpine track among rotten rocks, it crumbles beneath the tread. Every course of life but that of the man who delights in and keeps the law of the Lord comes to a fatal end, and leads to the brink of a precipice, over which the impetus of descent carries the reluctant foot. "The path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more till the noontide of the day. The way of the wicked is as darkness; they know not at what they stumble."

PSALM II.

1 Why do the nations muster with tumult,
And the peoples meditate vanity?
2 The kings of the earth take up their posts,
And the chieftains sit in counsel together
Against Jehovah and against His Anointed.
3 "Let us wrench off their bands,
And let us fling off from us their cords."

4 He who sits in the heavens laughs;
The Lord mocks at them.
5 Then He speaks to them in His anger-wrath,
And in His wrath-heat puts them in panic.
6 . . . "And yet I, I have set my King
Upon Zion, my holy mountain."

7 I will tell of a decree:
Jehovah said unto me, My son art thou;
I have begotten thee this day.
8 Ask from me and I will give thee the nations as thine inheritance,
And as thy possession the ends of the earth.
9 Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron,
Like a potter's vessel shalt thou shatter them.

10 And now, O kings, be wise;
Let yourselves be warned, O judges of the earth.
11 Serve Jehovah in fear,
And rejoice in trembling.
12 Kiss the Son (?), lest He be angry, and ye perish in [your] way;
For easily may His wrath kindle.
Blessed are all who take refuge in Him!

VARIOUS unsatisfactory conjectures as to a historical basis for this magnificent lyric have been made, but none succeeds in specifying events which fit with the situation painted in it. The banded

enemies are rebels, and the revolt is widespread; for the "kings of the earth" is a very comprehensive, if we may not even say a universal, expression. If taken in connection with "the uttermost parts of the earth" (ver. 8), which are the King's rightful dominion, it implies a sweep of authority and a breadth of opposition quite beyond any recorded facts. Authorship and date must be left undetermined. The psalm is anonymous, like Psalm i., and is thereby marked off from the psalms which follow in Book I., and with one exception are ascribed to David. Whether these two preludes to the Psalter were set in their present place on the completion of the whole book, or were prefixed to the smaller "Davidic" collection, cannot be settled. The date of composition may have been much earlier than that of either the smaller or the larger collection.

The true basis of the psalm is not some petty revolt of subject tribes, even if such could be adduced, but Nathan's prophecy in 2 Sam. vii., which sets forth the dignity and dominion of the King of Israel as God's son and representative. The poet-prophet of our psalm may have lived after many monarchs had borne the title, but failed to realise the ideal there outlined, and the imperfect shadows may have helped to lift his thoughts to the reality. His grand poem may be called an idealising of the monarch of Israel, but it is an idealising which expected realisation. The psalm is prophecy as well as poetry; and whether it had contemporaneous persons and events as a starting-point or not, its theme is a real person, fully possessing the prerogatives and wielding the dominion which Nathan had declared to be God's gift to the King of Israel.

The psalm falls into four strophes of three verses

each, in the first three of which the reader is made spectator and auditor of vividly painted scenes, while in the last the psalmist exhorts the rebels to return to allegiance.

In the first strophe (vv. 1-3) the conspiracy of banded rebels is set before us with extraordinary force. The singer does not delay to tell what he sees, but breaks into a question of astonished indignation as to what *can* be the cause of it all. Then, in a series of swift clauses, of which the vivid movement cannot be preserved in a translation, he lets us see what had so moved him. The masses of the "nations" are hurrying tumultuously to the mustering-place; the "peoples" are meditating revolt, which is smitingly stigmatised in anticipation as "vanity." But it is no mere uprising of the common herd; "the kings of the earth" take their stand as in battle-array, and the men of mark and influence lay their heads together, pressing close to one another on the divan as they plot. All classes and orders are united in revolt, and hurry and eagerness mark their action and throb in the words. The rule against which the revolt is directed is that of "Jehovah and His Anointed." That is one rule, not two,—the dominion of Jehovah exercised through the Messiah. The psalmist had grasped firmly the conception that God's visible rule is wielded by Messiah, so that rebellion against one is rebellion against both. Their "bands" are the same. Pure monotheist as the psalmist was, he had the thought of a king so closely associated with Jehovah, that he could name them in one breath as, in some sense, sharers of the same throne and struck at by the same revolt. The foundation of such a conception was given in the designation

of the Davidic monarch as God's vicegerent and representative, but its full justification is the relation of the historic Christ to the Father whose throne He shares in glory.

That eloquent "why" may include both the ideas of "for what reason?" and "to what purpose?" Opposition to that King, whether by communities or individuals, is unreasonable. Every rising of a human will against the rule which it is blessedness to accept is absurd, and hopelessly incapable of justification. The question, so understood, is unanswerable by the rebels or by any one else. The one mystery of mysteries is that a finite will should be able to lift itself against the Infinite Will, and be willing to use its power. In the other aspect, the question, like that pregnant "vanity," implies the failure of all rebellion. Plot and strive, conspire and muster, as men may, all is vanity and striving of wind. It is destined to break down from the beginning. It is as hopeless as if the stars were to combine to abolish gravitation. That dominion does not depend on man's acceptance of it, and he can no more throw it off by opposition than he can fling a somersault into space and so get away from earth. When we can vote ourselves out of submission to physical law, we may plot or fight ourselves out of subjection to the reign of Jehovah and of His Anointed.

All the self-will in the world does not alter the fact that the authority of Christ is sovereign over human wills. We cannot get away from it; but we can either lovingly embrace it, and then it is our life, or we can set ourselves against it, like an obstinate ox planting its feet and standing stock-still, and then the goad is driven deep and draws blood.

The metaphor of bands and cords is taken from the

fastenings of the yoke on a draught bullock. One can scarcely miss the lovely contrast of this truculent exhortation to rebellion with the gracious summons "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me." The "bands" are already on our necks in a very real sense, for we are all under Christ's authority, and opposition is rebellion, not the effort to prevent a yoke being imposed, but to shake off one already laid on. But yet the consent of our own wills is called for, and thereby we take the yoke, which is a stay rather than a fetter, and bear the burden which bears up those who bear it.

Psalm i. set side by side in sharp contrast the godly and the godless. Here a still more striking transition is made in the second strophe (vv. 4-6), which changes the scene to heaven. The lower half of the picture is all eager motion and strained effort; the upper is full of Divine calm. Hot with hatred, flushed with defiant self-confidence and busy with plots, the rebels hurry together like swarming ants on their hillock. "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh." That representation of the seated God contrasts grandly with the stir on earth. He needs not to rise from His throned tranquillity, but regards undisturbed the disturbances of earth. The thought embodied is like that expressed in the Egyptian statues of gods carved out of the side of a mountain, "moulded in colossal calm," with their mighty hands laid in their laps and their wide-opened eyes gazing down on the little ways of the men creeping about their feet.

And what shall we say of that daring and awful image of the laughter of God? The attribution of such action to Him is so bold that no danger of misunderstanding it is possible. It sends us at once to look for

its translation, which probably lies in the thought of the essential ludicrousness of opposition, which is discerned in heaven to be so utterly groundless and hopeless as to be absurd. "When He came nigh and beheld the city, He wept over it." The two pictures are not incapable of being reconciled. The Christ who wept over sinners is the fullest revelation of the heart of God, and the laughter of the psalm is consistent with the tears of Jesus as He stood on Olivet, and looked across the glen to the Temple glittering in the morning sun.

God's laughter passes into the utterance of His wrath at the time determined by Him. The silence is broken by His voice, and the motionless form flashes into action. One movement is enough to "vex" the enemies and fling them into panic, as a flock of birds put to flight by the lifting of an arm. There is a point, known to God alone, when He perceives that the fulness of time has come, and the opposition must be ended. By long-drawn-out, gentle patience He has sought to win to obedience (though that side of His dealings is not presented in this psalm), but the moment arrives when in world-wide catastrophes or crushing blows on individuals sleeping retribution wakes at the right moment, determined by considerations inappreciable by us: "Then does He speak in His wrath."

The last verse of this strophe is parallel with the last of the preceding, being, like it, the dramatically introduced speech of the actor in the previous verses. The revolters' mutual encouragement is directly answered by the sovereign word of God, which discloses the reason for the futility of their attempts. The "I" of ver. 6 is emphatic. On one side is that majestic "I have set my King"; on the other a world of rebels.

They may put their shoulders to the throne of the Anointed to overthrow it; but what of that? God's hand holds it firm, whatever forces press on it. All enmity of banded or of single wills breaks against and is dashed by it into ineffectual spray.

Another speaker is next heard, the Anointed King, who, in the third strophe (vv. 7-9), bears witness to Himself and claims universal dominion as His by a Divine decree. "Thou art my son; to-day have I begotten thee." So runs the first part of the decree. The allusion to Nathan's words to David is clear. In them the prophet spoke of the succession of David's descendants, the king as a collective person, so to speak. The psalmist, knowing how incompletely any or all of these had fulfilled the words which were the patent of their kingship, repeats them in confident faith as certain to be accomplished in the Messiah-king, who fills the future for him with a great light of hope. He knew not the historic person in whom the word has to be fulfilled, but it is difficult to resist the conclusion that he had before him the prospect of a king living as a man, the heir of the promises. Now, this idea of sonship, as belonging to the monarch, is much better illustrated by the fact that Israel, the nation, was so named, than by the boasts of Gentile dynasties to be sons of Zeus or Ra. The relationship is moral and spiritual, involving Divine care and love and appointment to office, and demanding human obedience and use of dignity for God. It is to be observed that in our psalm the day of the King's self-attestation is the day of His being "begotten." The point of time referred to is not the beginning of personal existence, but of investiture with royalty. With accurate insight, then, into the meaning of the words, the New Testa-

ment takes them as fulfilled in the Resurrection (Acts xiii. 33; Rom. i. 4). In it, as the first step in the process which was completed in the Ascension, the manhood of Jesus was lifted above the limitations and weaknesses of earth, and began to rise to the throne. The day of His resurrection was, as it were, the day of the birth of His humanity into royal glory.

Built upon this exaltation to royalty and sonship follows the promise of universal dominion. Surely the expectation of "the uttermost parts of the earth for a possession" bursts the bonds of the tiny Jewish kingdom! The wildest national pride could scarcely have dreamed that the narrow strip of seaboard, whose inhabitants never entered on any wide schemes of conquest, should expand into a universal monarchy, stretching even farther than the giant empires on either side. If such were the psalmist's expectations, they were never even approximately fulfilled; but the reference of the glowing words to Messiah's kingdom is in accordance with the current of prophetic hopes, and need cause no hesitation to those who believe in prophecy at all.

Universal dominion is God's gift to Messiah. Even while putting His foot on the step of the throne, Jesus said, "All power is *given* unto me." This dominion is founded not on His essential divinity, but on His suffering and sacrifice. His rule is the rule of God in Him, for He is the highest form of the Divine self-revelation, and whoso trusts, loves, and obeys Christ, trusts, loves, and obeys God in Him. The psalmist did not know in how much more profound a sense than he attached to his words they were true. They had an intelligible, great, and true meaning for him. They have a greater for us.

The Divine voice foretells victory over opposition and destruction to opposers. The sceptre is of iron, though the hand that holds it once grasped the reed. The word rendered "break" may also be translated, with a different set of vowels, "shepherd," and is so rendered by the LXX. (which Rev. ii. 27, etc., follows) and by some other versions. But, in view of the parallelism of the next clause, "break" is to be preferred. The truth of Christ's destructive energy is too often forgotten, and, when remembered, is too often thrown forward into another world. The history of this world ever since the Resurrection has been but a record of conquered antagonism to Him. The stone cut out without hands has dashed against the images of clay and silver and gold and broken them all. The Gospel of Christ is the great solvent of institutions not based upon itself. Its work is

> "To cast the kingdoms old
> Into another mould."

Destructive work has still to be done, and its most terrible energy is to be displayed in the future, when all opposition shall be withered into nothingness by the brightness of His presence. There are two kinds of breaking: a merciful one, when His love shatters our pride and breaks into penitence the earthen vessels of our hearts; and a terrible one, when the weight of His sceptre crushes, and His hand casts down in shivers "vessels of wrath, fitted to destruction."

We have listened to three voices, and now, in vv. 10-12, the poet speaks in solemn exhortation: "Be wise now, ye kings." The "now" is argumentative, not temporal. It means "since things are so." The kings addressed are the rebel monarchs whose power

seems so puny measured against that of "my King." But not only these are addressed, but all possessors of power and influence. Open-eyed consideration of the facts is true wisdom. The maddest thing a man can do is to shut his eyes to them and steel his heart against their instruction. This pleading invitation to calm reflection is the purpose of all the preceding. To draw rebels to loyalty, which is life, is the meaning of all appeals to terror. God and His prophet desire that the conviction of the futility of rebellion with a poor "ten thousand" against "the king of twenty thousands" should lead to "sending an embassage" to sue for peace. The facts are before men, that they may be warned and wise.

The exhortation which follows in vv. 11, 12 points to the conduct which will be dictated by wise reception of instruction. So far as regards ver. 11 there is little difficulty. The exhortation to "serve Jehovah with fear and rejoice with trembling" points to obedience founded on awe of God's majesty,—the fear which love does not cast out, but perfect; and to the gladness which blends with reverence, but is not darkened by it. To love and cleave to God, to feel the silent awe of His greatness and holiness giving dignity and solemnity to our gladness, and from this inmost heaven of contemplation to come down to a life of practical obedience —this is God's command and man's blessedness.

The close connection between Jehovah and Messiah in the preceding sections, in each of which the dominion of the latter is treated as that of the former and rebellion as against both at once, renders it extremely improbable that there should be no reference to the King in this closing hortatory strophe. The view-point of the psalm, if consistently retained throughout, requires

something equivalent to the exhortation to "kiss the Son" in token of fealty, to follow, "serve Jehovah." But the rendering "Son" is impossible. The word so translated is *Bar*, which is the Aramaic for *son*, but is not found in that sense in the Old Testament except in the Aramaic of Ezra and Daniel and in Prov. xxxi. 2, a chapter which has in other respects a distinct Aramaic tinge. No good reason appears for the supposition that the singer here went out of his way to employ a foreign word instead of the usual *Ben*. But it is probably impossible to make any good and certain rendering of the existing text. The LXX. and Targum agree in rendering, "Take hold of instruction," which probably implies another reading of Hebrew text. None of the various proposed translations—*e.g.*, *Worship purely*, *Worship the chosen One*—are without objection; and, on the whole, the supposition of textual corruption seems best. The conjectural emendations of Grätz, *Hold fast by warning*, or reproof; Cheyne's alternative ones, *Seek ye His face* ("Book of Psalms," adopted from Brüll) or *Put on* [*again*] *His bonds* ("Orig. of Psalt.," p. 351, adopted from Lagarde), and Hupfeld's (in his translation) *Cleave to Him*, obliterate the reference to the King, which seems needful in this section, as has been pointed out, and depart from the well-established meaning of the verb—namely, "kiss." These two considerations seem to require that a noun referring to Messiah, and grammatically object of the verb, should stand in the place occupied by *Son*. The Messianic reference of the psalm remains undimmed by the uncertainty of the meaning of this clause.

The transition from the representative of Jehovah to Jehovah Himself, which takes place in the next clause, is in accordance with the close union between them

which has marked the whole psalm. It is henceforth Jehovah only who appears till the close. But the anger which is destructive, and which may easily flash out like flames from a furnace mouth, is excited by opposition to Messiah's kingdom, and the exclusive mention of Jehovah in these closing clauses makes the picture of the anger the more terrible.

But since the disclosure of the danger of perishing "in [or as to] the way" or course of rebellious conduct is part of an exhortation, the purpose of which is that the threatened flash of wrath may never need to shoot forth, the psalmist will not close without setting forth the blessed alternative. The sweet benediction of the close bends round to the opening words of the companion psalm of prelude, and thus identifies the man who delights in the law of Jehovah with him who submits to the kingdom of God's Anointed. The expression "put their trust" literally means to take refuge in. The act of trust cannot be more beautifully or forcibly described than as the flight of the soul to God. They who take shelter in God need fear no kindling anger. They who yield to the King are they who take refuge in Jehovah; and such never know aught of His kingdom but its blessings, nor experience any flame of His wrath, but only the happy glow of His love.

PSALM III.

1 Jehovah, how many are my oppressors!
Many are rising against me.
2 Many are saying to my soul,
There is no salvation for him in God. Selah.

3 And yet Thou, Jehovah, art a shield round me;
My glory, and the lifter up of my head.
4 With my voice to Jehovah I cry aloud,
And He answers me from His holy mountain. Selah.

5 I laid myself down and slept;
I awaked; for Jehovah upholds me.
6 I am not afraid of ten thousands of people,
Who round about have set themselves against me.

7 Arise, Jehovah; save me, my God:
For Thou hast smitten all my enemies [on] the cheek-bone;
The teeth of the wicked Thou hast broken.
8 To Jehovah belongs salvation:
Upon Thy people be Thy blessing. Selah.

ANOTHER pair of psalms follows the two of the Introduction. They are closely connected linguistically, structurally, and in subject. The one is a morning, the other an evening hymn, and possibly they are placed at the beginning of the earliest psalter for that reason. Ewald and Hitzig accept the Davidic authorship, though the latter shifts the period in David's life at which they were composed to the mutiny of his men at Ziklag (1 Sam. xxx.). Cheyne thinks that "you will find no situation which corresponds to these psalms," though you "search the story of David's life

from end to end." He takes the whole of the Psalms from iii. to xvii., excepting viii., xv., xvi., as a group, "the heart utterances of the Church amidst some bitter persecution" — namely, "the period when faithful Israelites were so sorely oppressed both by traitors in their midst and by Persian tyrants," ("Orig. of Psalt.," pp. 226, 227). But correspondences of the two psalms with David's situation will strike many readers as being at least as close as that which is sought to be established with the "spiritual kernel of the nation during the Persian domination," and the absence of more specific reference is surely not unnatural in devout song, however strange it would be in prosaic narrative. We do not look for mention of the actual facts which wring the poet's soul and were peculiar to him, but are content with his expression of his religious emotions, which are common to all devout souls. Who expects Cowper to describe his aberrations of intellect in the "Olney Hymns"? But who cannot trace the connection of his pathetic strains with his sad lot? If ever a seeming reference to facts is pointed out in a so-called Davidic psalm, it is brushed aside as "prosaic," but the absence of such is, notwithstanding, urged as an argument against the authorship. Surely that is inconsistent.

This psalm falls into four strophes, three of which are marked by Selah. In the first (vv. 1, 2) the psalmist recounts his enemies. If we regard this as a morning psalm, it is touchingly true to experience that the first waking thought should be the renewed inrush of the trouble which sleep had for a time dammed back. His enemies are many, and they taunt him as forsaken of God. Surely it is a strong thing to say that there is no correspondence here with David's situation during Absalom's revolt. It was no partial conspiracy, but

practically the nation had risen against him, "ut totidem fere haberet hostes quot subditos" (Calvin).

Shimei's foul tongue spoke the general mind: "The Lord hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom" (2 Sam. xvi. 8). There had been sin enough in the king's recent past to give colour to the interpretation of his present calamity as the sign of his being forsaken of God. The conviction that such was the fact would swell the rebel ranks. The multitude has delight in helping to drown a sinking man who has been prosperous. The taunt went deep, for the Hebrew has "to my soul," as if the cruel scoff cut like a knife to the very centre of his personality, and wounded all the more because it gave utterance to his own fears. "The Lord hath bidden him," said David about Shimei's curses. But the psalmist is finding refuge from fears and foes even in telling how many there are, since he begins his complaint with "Jehovah." Without that word the exclamations of this first strophe are the voice of cowardice or despair. With it they are calmed into the appeal of trust.

The Selah which parts the first from the second strophe is probably a direction for an instrumental interlude while the singer pauses.

The second strophe (vv. 3, 4) is the utterance of faith, based on experience, laying hold of Jehovah as defence. By an effort of will the psalmist rises from the contemplation of surrounding enemies to that of the encircling Jehovah. In the thickest of danger and dread there is a power of choice left a man as to what shall be the object of thought, whether the stormy sea or the outstretched hand of the Christ. This harassed man flings himself out of the coil of troubles round about him and looks up to God. He sees in Him pre-

110327

cisely what he needs most at the moment, for in that infinite nature is fulness corresponding to all emptiness of ours. "A shield around me," as He had promised to be to Abraham in his peril; "my glory," at a time when calumny and shame were wrapping him about and his kingdom seemed gone; "the lifter up of my head," sunk as it is both in sadness and calamity, since Jehovah can both cheer his spirit and restore his dignity. And how comes this sudden burst of confidence to lighten the complaining soul? Ver. 4 tells. Experience has taught him that as often as he cries to Jehovah he is heard. The tenses in ver. 4 express a habitual act and a constant result. Not once or twice, but as his wont, he prays, and Jehovah answers. The normal relation between him and Jehovah is that of frank communion; and since it has long been so and is so now, even the pressure of present disaster does not make faith falter. It is hard to begin to trust when in the grip of calamity, but feet accustomed to the road to God can find it in the dark. There may be an allusion to David's absence from sanctuary and ark in ver. 4. The expectation of being answered "from His holy hill" gains in pathetic force when the lovely scene of submissive sacrifice in which he sent back the Ark is recalled (2 Sam. xv. 25). Though he be far from the place of prayer, and feeling the pain of absence, the singer's faith is not so tied to form as to falter in the assurance that his prayer is heard. Jehovah is shield, glory, and strengthener to the man who cries to Him, and it is by means of such crying that the heart wins the certitude that He is all these. Again the instruments sound and the singer pauses.

The third strophe (vv. 5, 6) beautifully expresses the tranquil courage which comes from trust. "Since

sleeping and safe waking again in ordinary circumstances is no such striking proof of Divine help that one in the psalmist's situation would be induced to think especially of it and to found his confidence on it, the view is to be taken that the psalmist in ver. 5 is contemplating the experience which he has just made in his present situation. "Surrounded by enemies, he was quite safe under God's protection and exposed to no peril even in the night" (Riehm, in Hupfeld *in loc.*). Surely correspondence with David's circumstances may be traced here. His little band had no fortress in Mahanaim, and Ahithophel's counsel to attack them by night was so natural that the possibility must have been present to the king. But another night had come and gone in safety, disturbed by no shout of an enemy. The nocturnal danger had passed, and day was again brightening.

They were safe because the Keeper of Israel had kept them. It is difficult to fit this verse into the theory that here the persecuted Israelitish Church is speaking, but it suits the situation pointed to in the superscription. To lie down and sleep in such circumstances was itself an act of faith, and a sign of the quiet heart which faith gives. Like Christ on the hard wooden "pillow" during the storm, or like Peter sleeping an infant's sleep the night before his purposed execution, this man can shut his eyes and quiet himself to slumber, though "ten thousands have set themselves against him." They ring him round, but cannot reach him through his shield. Ver. 6 rises to bold defiance, the result of the experience in ver. 5. How different the tone of reference to the swarms of the enemy here and in ver. 1! There the psalmist was counting them and cowering before them; here their very number is an element in his triumphant confidence. Courage comes

from thinking of the one Divine Ally, before whom myriads of enemies are nothing. One man with God to back him is always in the majority. Such courage, based on such experience and faith, is most modest and reasonable, but it is not won without an effort of will, which refuses to fear, and fixes a trustful gaze not on peril, but on the protector. "I will not be afraid" speaks of resolve and of temptations to fear, which it repels, and from "the nettle danger plucks the flower" *trust* and the fruit *safety*. Selah does not follow here. The tone of the strophe is that of lowly confidence, which is less congruous with an instrumental interlude than are the more agitated preceding strophes. The last strophe, too, is closely connected with the third, since faith bracing itself against fear glides naturally into prayer.

The final strophe (vv. 7, 8) gives the culmination of faith in prayer. "Arise, Jehovah," is quoted from the ancient invocation (Num. x. 35), and expresses in strongly anthropomorphic form the desire for some interposition of Divine power. Fearlessness is not so complete that the psalmist is beyond the need of praying. He is courageous because he knows that God will help, but he knows, too, that God's help depends on his prayer. The courage which does not pray is foolish, and will break down into panic; that which fears enough to cry "Arise, Jehovah," will be vindicated by victory. This prayer is built on experience, as the preceding confidence was. The enemies are now, according to a very frequent figure in the Psalter, compared to wild beasts. Smiting on the cheek is usually a symbol of insult, but here is better taken in close connection with the following "breaking the teeth." By a daring image Jehovah is represented as dealing the beasts of prey, who prowl round the psalmist with

open mouth, the buffets which shatter their jaws and dislodge their teeth, thus making them powerless to harm him. So it has been in the past, and that past is a plea that so it will be now. God will be but doing as He has done, if now He "arise." If He is to be true to Himself, and not to stultify His past deliverances, He must save his suppliant now. Such is the logic of faith, which is only valid on the supposition that God's resources and purpose are inexhaustible and unchangeable. The whole ends with confident anticipation of an answer. "Salvation belongeth unto Jehovah." The full spiritual meaning of that salvation was not yet developed. Literally, the word means "breadth," and so, by a metaphor common to many languages, deliverance as an act, and well-being or prosperity as a state. Deliverance from his enemies is the psalmist's main idea in the word here. It "belongs to Jehovah," since its bestowal is His act. Thus the psalmist's last utterance of trust traverses the scoff which wounded him so much (ver. 2), but in a form which beautifully combines affiance and humility, since it triumphantly asserts that salvation is in God's power, and silently implies that what is thus God's "to will and do" shall certainly be His suppliant's to enjoy.

Intensely personal as the psalm is, it is the prayer of a king; and rebels as the bulk of the people are ("ten thousands of the people"), they are still God's. Therefore all are included in the scope of his pitying prayer. In other psalms evil is invoked on evil-doers, but here hate is met by love, and the self-absorption of sorrow counteracted by wide sympathy. It is a lower exemplification of the same spirit which breathed from the lips of the greater King the prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

PSALM IV.

1 When I cry answer me, O God of my righteousness; Thou hast in straits made space for me:
Be gracious to me and hear my prayer.
2 Sons of men! how long shall my glory be mocked, [in that] ye love vanity,
[And] seek after a lie? Selah.
3 But know that Jehovah has set apart as His own him whom He favours:
Jehovah hears when I cry to Him.
4 Stand in awe, and sin not:
Speak in your hearts on your beds, and be silent. Selah.
5 Sacrifice sacrifices of righteousness,
And trust on Jehovah.
6 Many are saying, Who will let us see good?
Lift Thou upon us the light of Thy face, O Jehovah.
7 Thou hast given gladness in my heart,
More than in the time of their corn and their wine [when] they abound.
8 In peace will I lie down and at once sleep:
For Thou, Jehovah, in [my] loneliness, makest me dwell in safety.

PSALMS iii. and iv. are a pair. They are similar in expression (*my glory, there be many which say, I laid me down and slept*), in the psalmist's situation, and in structure (as indicated by the *Selahs*). But they need not be cotemporaneous, nor need the superscription of Psalm iii. be extended to Psalm iv. Their tone is different, the fourth having little reference to the personal danger so acutely felt in Psalm iii., and being mainly a gentle, earnest remonstrance with antagonists, seeking to win them to a better mind. The strophical

division into four parts of two verses each, as marked by the Selahs, is imperfectly carried out, as in Psalm iii., and does not correspond with the logical division—a phenomenon which occurs not infrequently in the Psalter, as in all poetry, where the surging thought or emotion overleaps its bounds. Dividing according to the form, we have four strophes, of which the first two are marked by Selah; dividing by the flow of thought, we have three parts of unequal length—prayer (ver. 1), remonstrance (vv. 2-5), communion and prayer (vv. 6-8).

The cry for an answer by deed is based on the name and on the past acts of God. Grammatically, it would be possible and regular to render "my God of righteousness," *i.e.*, "my righteous God"; but the pronoun is best attached to "righteousness" only, as the consideration that God is righteous is less relevant than that He is the source of the psalmist's righteousness. Since He is so, He may be expected to vindicate it by answering prayer by deliverance. He who feels that all good in himself comes from God may be quite sure that, sooner or later, and by some means or other, God will witness to His own work. To the psalmist nothing was so incredible as that God should not take care of what He had planted, or let the springing crop be trodden down or rooted up. The Old Testament takes prosperity as the Divine attestation of righteousness; and though they who worship the Man of Sorrows have new light thrown on the meaning of that conception, the substance of it remains true for ever. The compellation "God of my righteousness" is still mighty with God. The second ground of the prayer is laid in the past deeds of God. Whether the clause "Thou hast in straits made space for me" be taken relatively or not, it appeals to former deliverances as reasons for man's prayer and for God's

act. In many languages trouble and deliverance are symbolised by narrowness and breadth. Compression is oppression. Closely hemmed in by crowds or by frowning rocks, freedom of movement is impossible and breathing is difficult. But out in the open, one expatiates, and a clear horizon means an ample sky.

The strophe division keeps together the prayer and the beginning of the remonstrance to opponents, and does so in order to emphasise the eloquent, sharp juxtaposition of God and the "sons of men." The phrase is usually employed to mean persons of position, but here the contrast between the varying height of men's molehills is not so much in view as that between them all and the loftiness of God. The lips which by prayer have been purged and cured of quivering can speak to foes without being much abashed by their dignity or their hatred. But the very slight reference to the psalmist's own share in the hostility of these "sons of men" is noticeable. It is their false relation to God which is prominent throughout the remonstrance; and that being so, "my glory," in ver. 2, is probably to be taken, as in iii. 3, as a designation of God. It is usually understood to mean either personal or official dignity, but the suggested interpretation is more in keeping with the tone of the psalm. The enemies were really flouting God and turning that great name in which the singer gloried into a jest. They were not therefore idolaters, but practical heathen in Israel, and their "vanity" and "lies" were their schemes doomed to fail and their blasphemies. These two verses bring most vividly into view the contrast between the psalmist clinging to his helping God and the knot of opponents hatching their plans which are sure to fail.

The Selah indicates a pause in the song, as if to

underscore the question "How long?" and let it soak into the hearts of the foes, and then, in vv. 3 and 4, the remonstrating voice presses on them the great truth which has sprung anew in the singer's soul in answer to his prayer, and beseeches them to let it stay their course and still their tumult. By "the godly" is meant, of course the psalmist. He is sure that he belongs to God and is set apart, so that no real evil can touch him; but does he build this confidence on his own character or on Jehovah's grace? The answer depends on the meaning of the pregnant word rendered "godly," which here occurs for the first time in the Psalter. So far as its form is concerned, it may be either active, one who shows *chesed* (lovingkindness or favour), or passive, one to whom it is shown. But the usage in the Psalter seems to decide in favour of the passive meaning, which is also more in accordance with the general biblical view, which traces all man's hopes and blessings, not to his attitude to God, but to God's to him, and regards man's love to God as a derivative, "Amati amamus, amantes amplius meremur amari" (Bern). Out of His own deep heart of love Jehovah has poured His lovingkindness on the psalmist, as he thrillingly feels, and He will take care that His treasure is not lost; therefore this conviction, which has flamed up anew since the moment before when he prayed, brings with it the assurance that He "hears when I cry," as he had just asked Him to do. The slight emendation, adopted by Cheyne from Grätz and others, is tempting, but unnecessary. He would read, with a small change which would bring this verse into parallelism with xxxi. 22, "See how passing great lovingkindness Jehovah hath shown me"; but the present text is preferable, inasmuch as what we should expect to

be urged upon the enemies is not outward facts, but some truth of faith neglected by them. On such a truth the singer rests his own confidence; such a truth he lays, like a cold hand, on the hot brows of the plotters, and bids them pause and ponder. Believed, it would fill them with awe, and set in a lurid light the sinfulness of their assault on him. Clearly the rendering "Be ye angry" instead of "Stand in awe" gives a less worthy meaning, and mars the picture of the progressive conversion of the enemy into a devout worshipper, of which the first stage is the recognition of the truth in ver. 3; the second is the awestruck dropping of the weapons, and the third is the silent reflection in the calm and solitude of night. The psalm being an evening song, the reference to "your bed" is the more natural; but "speak in your hearts"—what? The new fact which you have learned from my lips. Say it quietly to yourselves then, when forgotten truths blaze on the waking eye, like phosphorescent writing in the dark, and the nobler self makes its voice heard. "Speak . . . and be silent," says the psalmist, for such meditation will end the busy plots against him, and in a wider application "that dread voice," heard in the awed spirit, "shrinks the streams" of passion and earthly desires, which otherwise brawl and roar there. Another strain of the "stringed instruments" makes that silence, as it were, audible, and then the remonstrance goes on once more.

It rises higher now, exhorting to positive godliness, and that in the two forms of offering "sacrifices of righteousness," which here simply means those which are prescribed or which are offered with right dispositions, and of trusting in Jehovah—the two aspects of true religion, which outwardly is worship and inwardly

is trust. The poet who could meet hate with no weapon but these earnest pleadings had learned a better lesson than "the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn, the love of love," and anticipated "bless them which curse you." The teacher who thus outlined the stages of the way back to God as recognition of His relation to the godly, solitary meditation thereon, forsaking of sin and hushing of the Spirit thereby, and finally worship and trust, knew the discipline for rebellious souls.

Ver. 6 seems at first sight to belong more closely to what follows than to what precedes, and is taken by those who hold the Davidic authorship as addressed to his followers beginning to despond. But it may be the continuance of the address to the enemies, carrying on the exhortation to trust. The sudden appearance of the plural "us" suggests that the psalmist associates himself with the persons whom he has been addressing, and, while he glances at the vain cries of the "many," would make himself the mouthpiece of the nascent faith which he hopes may follow his beseechings. The cry of *the many* would, in that case, have a general reference to the universal desire for "good," and would pathetically echo the hopelessness which must needs mingle with it, so long as the heart does not know who is the only good. The passionate weariness of the question, holding a negation in itself, is wonderfully contrasted with the calm prayer. The eyes fail for want of seeing the yearned-for blessing; but if Jehovah lifts the light of His face upon us, as He will certainly do in answer to prayer, "in His light we shall see light." Every good, however various, is sphered in Him. All colours are smelted into the perfect white and glory of His face.

There is no Selah after ver. 6, but, as in iii. 6, one is due, though omitted.

Vv. 7 and 8 are separated from ver. 6 by their purely personal reference. The psalmist returns to the tone of his prayer in ver. 1, only that petition has given place, as it should do, to possession and confident thankfulness. The many ask, Who? ; he prays "Lord." They have vague desires after God ; he knows what he needs and wants. Therefore in the brightness of that Face shining on him his heart is glad. The mirth of harvest and vintage is exuberant, but it is poor beside the deep, still blessedness which trickles round the heart that craves most the light of Jehovah's countenance. That craving is joy and the fruition is bliss. The psalmist here touches the bottom, the foundation fact on which every life that is not vanity must be based, and which verifies itself in every life that is so based. Strange and tragic that men should forget it and love vanity which mocks them, and, though won, still leaves them looking wearily round the horizon for any glimmer of good! The glad heart possessing Jehovah can, on the other hand, lay itself down in peace and sleep, though foes stand round. The last words of the psalm flow restfully like a lullaby. The expression of confidence gains much if "alone" be taken as referring to the psalmist. Solitary as he is, ringed round by hostility as he may be, Jehovah's presence makes him safe, and being thus safe, he is secure and confident. So he shuts his eyes in peace, though he may be lying in the open, beneath the stars, without defences or sentries. The Face brings light in darkness, gladness in want, enlargement in straits, safety in peril, and any and every good that any and every man needs.

PSALM V.

1 Give ear to my words, Jehovah;
Consider my meditation.
2 Listen to the voice of my crying, my King and my God,
For to Thee do I make supplication.
3 Jehovah, in the morning Thou shalt hear my voice;
In the morning will I order my [prayer] to Thee and keep watch.

4 For not a God delighting in wickedness art Thou;
Evil cannot sojourn with Thee.
5 Fools cannot stand before Thine eyes;
Thou hatest all workers of iniquity.
6 Thou destroyest the speakers of falsehood;
The man of blood and deceit Jehovah loathes.
7 But I, in the multitude of Thy loving-kindness I dare come into [Thy house;
I dare fall prostrate before Thy holy temple in Thy fear.

8 Jehovah, lead me in Thy righteousness, because of them that are spies on me;
Make Thy way level before me.
9 For in his mouth is nothing trustworthy;
Their inward part is destruction;
An open grave is their throat;
Their tongue they smooth.

10 Hold them guilty, Jehovah: let them fall by their own schemes;
In the multitude of their transgressions strike them down, for they have rebelled against Thee.
11 Then shall all those who take refuge in Thee be glad;
For ever shall they shout for joy, since Thou dost shelter them;
And they that love Thy name shall exult in Thee.
12 For Thou dost bless the righteous;
Jehovah, as with a shield, with favour dost Thou compass him [about.

THE reference to the temple in ver. 7 is not conclusive against the Davidic authorship of this psalm, since the same word is applied in 1 Sam. i.

9 and iii. 3 to the house of God in Shiloh. It means a palace, and may well be used for any structure, even if a hair tent, in which God dwelt. No doubt it is oftenest used for the Solomonic temple, but it does not necessarily refer to it. Its use here, then, cannot be urged as fatal to the correctness of the superscription. At the same time, it does create a certain presumption against it. But there is nothing in the psalm to determine its date, and its worth is quite independent of its authorship. The psalmist is surrounded by foes, and seeks access to God. These are constant features of the religious life, and their expression here fits as closely to the present time as to any past.

The psalm falls into two main parts: vv. 1-7 and 8-12. The former division deals with the inner side of the devout life, its access to God, to whom sinful men cannot approach, the latter with the outward side, the conduct, "the way" in which the psalmist seeks to be led, and in which sinful men come to ruin because they will not walk. Naturally the inward comes first, for communion with God in the secret place of the Most High must precede all walking in His way and all blessed experience of His protection, with the joy that springs from it. These two halves of the psalm are arranged in inverted parallelism, the first verse of the second part (ver. 8) corresponding to the last verse of the first (ver. 7) and being, like it, purely personal; vv. 9 and 10 corresponding similarly to vv. 4-6 and, like them, painting the character and fate of evil-doers; and, finally, vv. 11, 12, answering to vv. 1-3 and representing the blessedness of the devout soul, as in the one case led and protected by God and therefore glad, and in the other abiding in His presence. The whole is a prayerful meditation on the inexhaustible

theme of the contrasted blessedness of the righteous and misery of the sinner as shown in the two great halves of life: the inward of communion and the outward of action.

In the first part (vv. 1-7) the central thought is that of access to God's presence, as the desire and purpose of the psalmist (1-3), as barred to evil-doers (4-6), and as permitted to, and embraced as his chief blessing by, the singer (7). The petition to be heard in vv. 1 and 2 passes into confidence that he is heard in ver. 3. There is no shade of sadness nor trace of struggle with doubt in this prayer, which is all sunny and fresh, like the morning sky, through which it ascends to God. "Consider [or Understand] my meditation"—the brooding, silent thought is spread before God, who knows unspoken desires, and "understands thoughts afar off." The contrast between "understanding the meditation" and "hearkening to the voice of my cry" is scarcely unintentional, and gives vividness to the picture of the musing psalmist, in whom, as he muses, the fire burns, and he speaks with his tongue, in a "cry" as loud as the silence from which it issued had been deep. Meditations that do not pass into cries and cries which are not preceded by meditations are alike imperfect. The invocation "my King" is full of meaning if the singer be David, who thus recognises the delegated character of his own royalty; but whoever wrote the psalm, that expression equally witnesses to his firm grasp of the true theocratic idea.

Noteworthy is the intensely personal tone of the invocation in both its clauses, as in the whole of these first verses, in every clause of which "my" or "I" occurs. The poet is alone with God and seeking to clasp still closer the guiding hand, to draw still nearer

to the sweet and awful presence where is rest. The invocation holds a plea in itself. He who says, "My King and my God," urges the relation, brought about by God's love and accepted by man's faith, as a ground for the hearing of his petition. And so prayer passes into swift assurance; and with a new turn in thought, marked by the repetition of the name "Jehovah" (ver. 3), he speaks his confidence and his resolve. "In the morning" is best taken literally, whether we suppose the psalm to have been composed for a morning song or no. Apparently the compilers of the first Psalter placed it next to Psalm iv., which they regarded as an evening hymn, for this reason. "I will lay me down and sleep" is beautifully followed by "In the morning shalt Thou hear my voice." The order of clauses in ver. 3 is significant in its apparent breach of strict sequence, by which God's hearing is made to precede the psalmist's praying. It is the order dictated by confidence, and it is the order in which the thoughts rise in the trustful heart. He who is sure that God will hear will therefore address himself to speak. First comes the confidence, and then the resolve. There are prayers wrung from men by sore need, and in which doubt causes faltering, but the happier, serener experience is like that of this singer. He resolves to "order" his prayer, using there the word employed for the priest's work in preparing the materials for the morning sacrifice. Thus he compares his prayer to it, and stands at the same level as the writer of Psalm iv., with whose command to "offer the sacrifices of righteousness" this thought again presents a parallel.

A psalmist who has grasped the idea that the true sacrifice is prayer is not likely to have missed the cognate thought that the "house of the Lord," of

which he will presently speak, is something other than any material shrine. But to offer the sacrifice is not all which he rejoices to resolve. He will "keep watch," as Habakkuk said that he would do, on his watch-tower; and that can only mean that he will be on the outlook for the answer to his prayer, or, if we may retain the allusion to sacrifice, for the downward flash of the Divine fire, which tells his prayer's acceptance. Many a prayer is offered, and no eyes afterwards turned to heaven to watch for the answer, and perhaps some answers sent are like water spilled on the ground, for want of such observance.

The confidence and resolve ground themselves on God's holiness, through which the necessary condition of approach to Him comes to be purity—a conviction which finds expression in all religions, but is nowhere so vividly conceived or construed as demanding such stainless inward whiteness as in the Psalter. The "for" of ver. 4 would naturally have heralded a statement of the psalmist's grounds for expecting that he would be welcomed in his approach, but the turn of thought, which postpones that, and first regards God's holiness as shutting out the impure, is profoundly significant. "Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness" means more than the simple "Thou hast not pleasure" would do; it argues from the character of God, and glances at some of the foul deities whose nostrils snuff up sensual impurity as acceptable sacrifice. The one idea of absolute contrariety between God and evil is put in a rich variety of shapes in vv. 4-6, which first deal with it negatively in three clauses (*not a God; not dwell; not stand in Thy sight*) and then positively in other three (*hatest; shalt destroy; abhorreth*). "Evil shall not sojourn

with Thee." The verb is to be taken in its full meaning of sojourning as a guest-friend, who has the right to hospitality and defence. It thus constitutes the antithesis to ver. 7. Clearly the sojourning does not mean access to the temple, but abiding with God. The barriers are of the same nature as the communion which they hinder, and something far deeper is meant than outward access to any visible shrine. No one sojourned in the temple. In like manner, the "standing in Thy sight" is a figure drawn from courts, reminding us of "my King" in ver. 2 and suggesting the impossibility of evil or its doers approaching the Divine throne.

But there is more than a negative side to the relation between God and evil, which the psalm goes on to paint in sombre colours, for God not only does not delight in sin, but hates it with a hatred like the physical loathing of some disgusting thing, and will gather all His alienation into one fatal lightning bolt. Such thoughts do not exhaust the truth as to the Divine relation to sin. They did not exhaust the psalmist's knowledge of that relation, and still less do they exhaust ours, but they are parts of the truth to-day as much as then, and nothing in Christ's revelation has antiquated them.

The psalmist's vocabulary is full of synonyms for sin, which witness to the profound consciousness of it which law and ritual had evoked in devout hearts. First, he speaks of it in the abstract, as "wickedness" and "evil." Then he passes to individuals, of whom he singles out two pairs, the first a more comprehensive and the second a more specific designation. The former pair are "the foolish" and "workers of iniquity." The word for "foolish" is usually translated by the moderns

"arrogant," but the parallelism with the general expression "workers of iniquity" rather favours a less special meaning, such as Hupfeld's "fools" or the LXX.'s "transgressors." Only in the last pair are special forms of evil mentioned, and the two selected are significant of the psalmist's own experience. *Liars* and *men of blood and craft* are his instances of the sort of sinners most abominable to God. That specification surely witnesses to his own sufferings from such.

In ver. 7 the psalmist comes back to the personal reference, contrasting his own access to God with the separation of evil-doers from His presence. But he does not assert that he has the right of entrance because he is pure. Very strikingly he finds the ground of his right of entry to the palace in God's "multitude of mercy," not in his own innocence. Answering to "in Thy righteousness" is "in Thy fear." The one phrase expresses God's disposition to man which makes access possible, the other man's disposition to God which makes worship acceptable. "In the multitude of Thy mercy" and "in Thy fear," taken together, set forth the conditions of approach. Having regard to ver. 4, it seems impossible to restrict the meaning of "Thy house" to the material sanctuary. It is rather a symbol of communion, protection, and friendship. Does the meaning pass into the narrower sense of outward worship in the material "temple" in the second clause? It may be fairly taken as doing so (Hupfeld). But it may be maintained that the whole verse refers to the spiritual realities of prayer and fellowship, and not at all to the externalities of worship, which are used as symbols, just as in ver. 3 prayer is symbolised by the morning sacrifice. But probably it is better to suppose that the psalmist's faith, though

not tied to form, was fed by form, and that symbol and reality, the outward and the inward worship, the access to the temple and the approach of the silent soul to God, are fused in his psalm as they tended to be in his experience. Thus the first part of the psalm ends with the psalmist prostrate (for so the word for "worship" means) before the palace sanctuary of his King and God. It has thus far taught the conditions of approach to God, and given a concrete embodiment of them in the progress of the singer's thoughts from petition to assurance and from resolve to accomplishment.

The second part may be taken as his prayer when in the temple, whether that be the outward sanctuary or no. It is likewise a further carrying out of the contrast of the condition of the wicked and of the lovers of God, expressed in terms applying to outward life rather than to worship. It falls into three parts: the personal prayer for guidance in life, the contemplation of evil-doers, and the vehement prayer for their destruction, corresponding to vv. 4-6, and the contrasted prayer for the righteous, among whom he implies his own inclusion.

The whole of the devout man's desires for himself are summed up in that prayer for guidance. All which the soul needs is included in these two: access to God in the depths of still prostration before His throne as the all-sufficient good for the inner life; guidance, as by a shepherd, on a plain path, chosen not by self-will but by God, for the outward. He who has received the former in any degree will in the same measure have the latter. To dwell in God's house is to desire His guidance as the chief good. "In Thy righteousness" is capable of two meanings: it may either

designate the path by which the psalmist desired to be led, or the Divine attribute to which he appealed. The latter meaning, which is substantially equivalent to "because Thou art righteous," is made more probable by the other instances in the psalm of a similar use of "in" (*in the multitude of Thy mercy; in Thy fear; in the multitude of their transgressions*). His righteousness is manifested in leading those who seek for His guidance (compare Psalm xxv. 8; xxxi. 1, etc.). Then comes the only trace in the psalm of the presence of enemies, because of whom the singer prays for guidance. It is not so much that he fears falling into their hands as that he dreads lest, if left to himself, he may take some step which will give them occasion for malicious joy in his fall or his calamity. Wherever a man is earnestly God-fearing, many eyes watch him, and gleam with base delight if they see him stumble. The psalmist, whether David or another, had that cross to carry, like every thorough-going adherent of the religious ideal (or of any lofty ideal, for that matter); and his prayer shows how heavy it was, since thoughts of it mingled with even his longings for righteousness. "Plain" does not mean *obvious*, but *level*, and may possibly include both freedom from stumbling-blocks ("Lead us not into temptation") and from calamities, but the prevalent tone of the psalm points rather to the former. He who knows his own weaknesses may legitimately shrink from snares and occasions to fall, even though, knowing the wisdom of his Guide and the help that waits on his steps, he may "count it all joy" when he encounters them.

The picture of the evil-doers in ver. 9 is introduced, as in ver. 4, with a "for." The sinners here are evidently the *enemies* of the previous verse Their sins

are those of speech; and the force of the rapid clauses of the picture betrays how recently and sorely the psalmist had smarted from lies, flatteries, slanders, and all the rest of the weapons of smooth and bitter tongues. He complains that there is no faithfulness or steadfastness in "his mouth"—a distributive singular, which immediately passes into the plural—nothing there that a man can rely on, but all treacherous. "Their inward part is destruction." The other rendering, "engulfing ruin" or "a yawning gulf," is picturesque; but *destruction* is more commonly the meaning of the word and yields a vigorous sense here. They plot inwardly the ruin of the men whom they flatter. The figure is bold. Down to this pit of destruction is a way like an open sepulchre, the throat expanded in the act of speech; and the falsely smoothed tongue is like a slippery approach to the descent (so Jennings and Lowe). Such figures strike Western minds as violent, but are natural to the East. The shuddering sense of the deadly power of words is a marked characteristic of the Psalter. Nothing stirs psalmists to deeper indignation than "God's great gift of speech abused," and this generation would be all the better for relearning the lesson.

The psalmist is "in the sanctuary," and there "understands their end," and breaks into prayer which is also prophecy. The vindication of such prayers for the destruction of evil-doers is that they are not the expressions of personal enmity ("They have rebelled against Thee"), and that they correspond to one side of the Divine character and acts, which was prominent in the Old Testament epoch of revelation, and is not superseded by the New. But they do belong to that lower level; and to hesitate to admit their imperfection from the Christian point of view is to neglect the plain

teaching of our Lord, who built His law of the kingdom on the declared relative imperfection of the ethics of the Old. Terrible indeed are the prayers here. *Hold them guilty*—that is, probably, treat them as such by punishing; *let them fall; thrust them out*—from Thy presence, if they have ventured thither, or out into the darkness of death. Let us be thankful that we dare not pray such prayers, but let us not forget that for the psalmist not to have prayed them would have indicated, not that he had anticipated the tenderness of the Gospel, but that he had failed to learn the lesson of the law and was basely tolerant of baseness.

But we come into the sunshine again at the close, and hear the contrasted prayer, which thrills with gladness and hope. "When the wicked perish there is shouting." The servants of God, relieved from the incubus and beholding the fall of evil, lift up their praises. The order in which the designations of these servants occur is very noteworthy. It is surely not accidental that we have them first described as "those that trust in Thee," then as "all them that love Thy name," and finally as "the righteous." What is this sequence but an anticipation of the evangelical order? The root of all is trust, then love, then righteousness. Love follows trust. "We have known and believed the love which God hath to us." Righteousness follows trust and love, inasmuch as by faith the new life enters the heart and inasmuch as love supplies the great motive for keeping the commandments. So root, stem, and flower are here, wrapped up, as it were, in a seed, which unfolds into full growth in the New Testament. The literal meaning of the word rendered "put their trust" is "flee as to a refuge," and that beautifully expresses the very essence of the act of faith; while the

same metaphor is carried on in "defendest," which literally means *coverest.* The fugitive who shelters in God is covered by the shadow of His wing. Faith, love, and righteousness are the conditions of the purest joy. Trust is joy; love is joy; obedience to a loved law is joy. And round him who thus, in his deepest self, dwells in God's house and in his daily life walks, with these angels for his companions, on God's path, which by choice he has made his own, there is ever cast the broad buckler of God's favour. He is safe from all evil on whom God looks with love, and he on whom God so looks is he whose heart dwells in God's house and whose feet "travel on life's common way in cheerful godliness."

PSALM VI.

1 Jehovah, not in Thine anger do Thou correct me,
And not in Thy hot wrath do Thou chastise me.
2 Be gracious to me, Jehovah, for I am withered away;
Heal me, Jehovah, for my bones are dismayed:
3 And my soul is sorely dismayed;
And Thou, Jehovah—how long?

4 Return, Jehovah, deliver my soul;
Save me for the sake of Thy loving-kindness.
5 For in death there is no remembrance of Thee;
In Sheol who gives thee thanks?

6 I am wearied out with my groaning;
Every night I make my bed swim;
With my tears I melt away my couch.
7 My eye is wasted with trouble;
It is aged because of all my oppressors.

8 Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity,
For Jehovah has heard the voice of my weeping.
9 Jehovah has heard my supplication;
Jehovah will accept my prayer.
10 Ashamed and sore dismayed shall be all my enemies;
They shall turn back, shall be ashamed in a moment.

THE theme and progress of thought in this psalm are very common, especially in those attributed to David. A soul compassed by enemies, whose hate has all but sapped the life out of it, "catches at God's skirts and prays," and thence wins confidence which anticipates deliverance and victory. There are numerous variations of this *leitmotif*, and each of the psalms which embody it has its own beauty, its own

discords resolved into its own harmonies. The representation of the trouble of spirit as producing wasting of the body is also frequent, and is apparently not to be taken as metaphor, though not to be pressed, as if the psalmist were at once struck with the two calamities of hostility and disease, but the latter is simply the result of the former, and will disappear with it. It is needless to look for a historical occasion of the psalm, but to an ear that knows the tones of sorrow, or to a heart that has itself uttered them, the supposition that in these pathetic cries we hear only a representative Israelite bewailing the national ruin sounds singularly artificial. If ever the throb of personal anguish found tears and a voice, it does so in this psalm. Whoever wrote it wrote with his blood. There are in it no obvious references to events in the recorded life of David, and hence the ascription of it to him must rest on something else than the interpretation of the psalm. The very absence of such allusions is a fact to be dealt with by those who deny the accuracy of the attribution of authorship. But, however that question may be settled, the worth of this little plaintive cry depends on quite other considerations than the discovery of the name of the singer or the nature of his sorrow. It is a transcript of a perennial experience, a guide for a road which all feet have to travel. Its stream runs turbid and broken at first, but calms and clears as it flows. It has four curves or windings, which can scarcely be called strophes without making too artificial a framework for such a simple and spontaneous gush of feeling. Still the transitions are clear enough.

In vv. 1-3 we have a cluster of sharp, short cries to God for help, which all mean the same thing. In

each of these the great name of Jehovah is repeated, and in each the plea urged is simply the sore need of the suppliant. These are no "vain repetitions," which are pressed out of a soul by the grip of the rack; and it is not "taking the name of the Lord in vain" when four times in three short verses the passionate cry for help is winged with it as the arrow with its feather. Two thoughts fill the psalmist's consciousness, or rather one thought—the Lord—and one feeling—his pains. In ver. 1 the Hebrew makes "in Thine anger" and "in Thine hot wrath" emphatic by setting these two phrases between the negative and the verb: "Not in Thine anger rebuke me; not in Thy heat chasten me." He is willing to submit to both rebuke and chastisement; but he shrinks appalled from that form of either which tends to destruction, not to betterment. There are chastisements in tenderness, which express God's love, and there are others which manifest His alienation and wrath. This psalmist did not think that all Divine retribution was intended for reformation. To him there was such a thing as wrath which slew. Jeremiah has the same distinction (x. 24), and the parallel has been made an argument for the later date of the psalm. Cheyne and others assume that Jeremiah is the original, but that is simple conjecture, and the prophet's conspicuous fondness for quotations from older authors makes the supposition more probable that the psalm is the earlier. Resignation and shrinking blend in that cry, in which a heart conscious of evil confesses as well as implores, recognises the justice and yet deprecates the utmost severity of the blow. He who asks, "Not in Thine anger rebuke me," thereby submits to *loving* chastisement.

Then follow in vv. 2 and 3 three short petitions,

which are as much cries of pain as prayers, and as much prayers as cries of pain. In the two former the prayer is put first, and its plea second; in the last the order is reversed, and so the whole is, as it were, enclosed in a circlet of prayer. Two words make the petition in each clause, "Have mercy on me, Jehovah" (tastelessly corrected by Grätz into "Revive me"), and "Heal me, Jehovah." The third petition is daring and pregnant in its incompleteness. In that emphatic "And Thou, Jehovah," the psalmist looks up, with almost reproach in his gaze, to the infinite Personality which seems so unaccountably passive. The hours that bring pain are leaden-footed, and their moments each seem an eternity. The most patient sufferer may cry, "How long?" and God will not mistake the voice of pain for that of impatience. This threefold prayer, with its triple invocation, has a triple plea, which is all substantially one. His misery fills the psalmist's soul, and he believes that God will feel for him. He does not at first appeal to God's revealed character, except in so far as the plaintive reiteration of the Divine name carries such an appeal, but he spreads out his own wretchedness, and he who does that has faith in God's pity. "I am withered away," like a faded flower. "My bones are vexed";—the physical effects of his calamity, "bones" being put for the whole body, and regarded as the seat of sensibility, as is frequently the usage. "Vexed" is too weak a rendering. The idea is that of the utmost consternation. Not only the body, but the soul, partakes in the dismay. The "soul" is even more shaken than the "bones"; that is to say, mental agitation rather than physical disease (and the latter as the result of the former) troubles the psalmist. We can scarcely fail

to remember the added sanctity which these plaintive words have received, since they were used by the Prince of sufferers when all but in sight of the cross.

The next turn of thought includes vv. 4, 5, and is remarkable for the new pleas on which it rests the triple prayer, "Return; deliver; save." God is His own motive, and His self-revelation in act must always be self-consistent. Therefore the plea is presented, "for Thy loving-kindness' sake." It beseeches Him to be what He is, and to show Himself as still being what He had always been. The second plea is striking both in its view of the condition of the dead and in its use of that view as an argument with God. Like many other psalmists, the writer thinks of Sheol as the common gathering-place of the departed, a dim region where they live a poor shadowy life, inactive, joyless, and all but godless, inasmuch as praise, service, and fellowship with Him have ceased.

That view is equally compatible with the belief in a resurrection and the denial of it, for it assumes continued individual consciousness. It is the prevailing tone in the Psalter and in Job and Ecclesiastes. But in some psalms, which embody the highest rapture of inward and mystical devotion, the sense of present union with God bears up the psalmist into the sunlight of the assurance that against such a union death can have no power, and we see the hope of immortality in the very act of dawning on the devout soul. May we not say that the subjective experience of the reality of communion with God now is still the path by which the certainty of its perpetuity in a future life is reached? The objective proof in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is verified by this experience. The psalmists had not the former, but, having the latter, they attained to at

all events occasional confidence in a blessed life beyond. But the tone of such triumphant glimpses as xvi. 10, xvii. 15, xlix. 15, lxxiii. 24, is of a higher mood than that of this and other psalms, which probably represent the usual view of devout Hebrews.

The fact, as it appeared to those at the then stage of revelation, that remembrance and praise of God were impossible in Sheol, is urged as a plea. That implies the psalmist's belief that God cared for men's praise—a thought which may be so put as to make Him an almighty Selfishness, but which in its true aspect is the direct inference from the faith that He is infinite Love. It is the same sweet thought of Him which Browning has when he makes God say, "I miss my little human praise." God's joy in men's praise is joy in men's love and in their recognition of His love.

The third turn of feeling is in vv. 6 and 7. The sense of his own pains which, in the two previous parts of the psalm, had been contending with the thought of God, masters the psalmist in these dreary verses, in which the absence of the name of God is noteworthy as expressive of his absorption in brooding over his misery. The vehemence of the manifestations of sorrow and the frankness of the record of these manifestations in the song are characteristic of the emotional, demonstrative Eastern temperament, and strike our more reticent dispositions as excessive. But however expressed in unfamiliar terms, the emotion which wails in these sad verses is only too familiar to men of all temperaments. All sad hearts are tempted to shut out God and to look only at their griefs. There is a strange pleasure in turning round the knife in the wound and recounting the tokens of misery. This man feels some ease in telling how he had exhausted his strength with groan-

ing and worn away the sleepless night with weeping. Night is ever the nurse of heavy thought, and stings burn again then. The hyperbolical expressions that he had set his bed afloat with his tears and "melted" it (as the word means) are matched by the other hyperboles which follow, describing the effect of this unmeasured weeping on his eyes. He had wept them away, and they were bleared and dim like those of an old man. The cause of this passion of weeping is next expressed, in plain words, which connect this turn of the thought with the next verses, and seem to explain the previously mentioned physical pains as either metaphorical or consequent on the hostility of "mine adversaries."

But even while thus his spirit is bitterly burying itself in his sorrows the sudden certainty of the answer to his prayer flashes on him. "Sometimes a light surprises," as Cowper, who too well knew what it was to be worn with groaning, has sung. That swift conviction witnesses its origin in a Divine inspiration by its very suddenness. Nothing has changed in circumstances, but everything has changed in aspect. Wonder and exultation throb in the threefold assurance that the prayer is heard. In the two former clauses the "hearing" is regarded as a present act; in the latter the "receiving" is looked for in the future. The process, which is usually treated as one simple act, is here analysed. "God has heard; therefore God will receive"—*i.e.*, answer—"my weeping prayer." Whence came that confidence but from the breath of God on the troubled spirit? "The peace of God" is ever the reward of submissive prayer. In this confidence a man can front the close-knit ring of enemies, of whatever sort they be, and bid them back. Their

triumphant dismissal is a vivid way of expressing the certainty of their departure, with their murderous hate unslaked and baulked. "Mine enemies" are "workers of iniquity." That is a daring assumption, made still more remarkable by the previous confession that the psalmist's sorrow was God's rebuke and chastening. But a man has the right to believe that his cause is God's in the measure in which he makes God's cause his. In the confidence of prayer heard, the psalmist can see "things that are not as though they were," and, though no change has passed on the beleaguering hosts, triumphs in their sure rout and retreat. Very significantly does he predict in ver. 10 the same fate for them which he had bewailed as his own. The "dismay" which had afflicted his soul shall pass to them ("sore vexed"). Since God "returns" (ver. 4), the enemy will have to "return" in baffled abandonment of their plans, and be "ashamed" at the failure of their cruel hopes. And all this will come as suddenly as the glad conviction had started up in the troubled heart of the singer. His outward life shall be as swiftly rescued as his inward has been. One gleam of God's presence in his soul had lit its darkness, and turned tears into sparkling homes of the rainbow; one flash of that same presence in his outward life shall scatter all his foes with like swiftness.

PSALM VII.

1 Jehovah, my God, in Thee I take refuge;
Save me from all my pursuers, and deliver me,
2 Lest like a lion he tear my soul, breaking it while there is no deliverer.
3 Jehovah, my God, if I have done this,
If there is iniquity in my hands,
4 If I have repaid evil to him who was at peace with me—
Nay, I have delivered him that was my enemy causelessly—
5 May the enemy chase my soul and overtake it, and trample my life to the ground!
And may he lay my honour in the dust! Selah.

6 Arise, Jehovah, in Thine anger;
Lift up Thyself against the ragings of my adversaries,
And awake for me: judgment Thou hast appointed.
7 And let a gathering of peoples stand round Thee,
And above it sit Thou on high.
8 Jehovah will judge the peoples;
Do me right, Jehovah, according to my righteousness and according to my innocence [that is] upon me.
9 Let the evil of the wicked come to an end, and establish Thou the righteous,
For a Trier of hearts and reins is God the righteous.
10 My shield is upon God,
The Saviour of the upright-hearted.

11 God is a righteous Judge,
And a God who is angry every day.
12 If [a man] turn not, He will sharpen His sword;
His bow He has bent, and made it ready.
13 And at him He has aimed deadly weapons;
His arrows He will kindle into flaming darts.
14 See! he is in labour with wickedness;
Yea, he is pregnant with mischief, and gives birth to a lie.

15 A pit has he sunk, and dug it out;
And he will fall into the hole he is making.
16 His mischief shall come back on his own head,
And upon his own skull shall his violence come down.

17 I will thank Jehovah according to His righteousness,
And sing with the harp to the name of Jehovah most high.

THIS is the only psalm with the title "Shiggaion." The word occurs only here and in Hab. iii. 1, where it stands in the plural, and with the preposition "upon," as if it designated instruments. The meaning is unknown, and commentators, who do not like to say so, have much ado to find one. The root is a verb, "to wander," and the explanation is common that the word describes the disconnected character of the psalm, which is full of swiftly succeeding emotions rather than of sequent thoughts. But there is no such exceptional discontinuity as to explain the title. It may refer to the character of the musical accompaniment rather than to that of the words. The authorities are all at sea, the LXX. shirking the difficulty by rendering "psalm," others giving "error" or "ignorance," with allusion to David's repentance after cutting off Saul's skirt or to Saul's repentance of his persecuting David. The later Jewish writers quoted by Neubauer ("Studia Biblic.," ii. 36, *sq.*) guess at most various meanings, such as "love and pleasure," "occupation with music," "affliction," "humility," while others, again, explain it as the name of a musical instrument. Clearly the antiquity of the title is proved by this unintelligibility. If we turn to the other part of it, we find further evidence of age and of independence. Who was "Cush, a Benjamite"? He is not mentioned elsewhere. The author of the title, then, had access to some sources for David's life other than the Biblical records; and, as Hupfeld

acknowledges, we have here evidence of ancient ascription of authorship which "has more weight than most of the others." Cush has been supposed to be Shimei or Saul himself, and to have been so called because of his swarthy complexion (Cush meaning an African) or as a jest, because of his personal beauty. Cheyne, following Krochmal, would correct into "because of [Mordecai] the son of Kish, a Benjamite," and finds in this entirely conjectural and violent emendation an "attestation that the psalm was very early regarded as a work of the Persian age" ("Orig. of Psalt.," p. 229). But there is really no reason of weight for denying the Davidic authorship, as Ewald, Hitzig, Hupfeld, and Riehm allow; and there is much in 1 Sam. xxiv.-xxvi. correspondent with the situation and emotions of the psalmist here, such as, *e.g.*, the protestations of innocence, the calumnies launched at him, and the call on God to judge. The tone of the psalm is high and courageous, in remarkable contrast to the depression of spirit in the former psalm, up out of which the singer had to pray himself. Here, on the contrary, he fronts the enemy, lion-like though he be, without a quiver. It is the courage of innocence and of trust. Psalm vi. wailed like some soft flute; Psalm vii. peals like the trumpet of judgment, and there is triumph in the note. The whole may be divided into three parts, of which the close of the first is marked by the Selah at the end of ver. 5; and the second includes vv. 6–10. Thus we have the appeal of innocence for help (vv. 1–5), the cry for more than help—namely, definite judgment (vv. 6–10)—and the vision of judgment (vv. 11–17).

The first section has two main thoughts: the cry for help and the protestation of innocence. It is in accordance with the bold triumphant tone of the psalm

that its first words are a profession of faith in Jehovah. It is well to look *to* God before looking *at* dangers and foes. He who begins with trust can go on to think of the fiercest antagonism without dismay. Many of the psalms ascribed to David begin thus, but it is no mere stereotyped formula. Each represents a new act of faith, in the presence of a new danger. The word for "put trust" here is very illuminative and graphic, meaning properly the act of fleeing to a refuge. It is sometimes blended with the image of a sheltering rock, sometimes with the still tenderer one of a mother-bird, as when Ruth "came to trust under the wings of Jehovah," and in many other places. The very essence of the act of faith is better expressed by that metaphor than by much subtle exposition. Its blessedness as bringing security and warm shelter and tenderness more than maternal is wrapped up in the sweet and instructive figure. The many enemies are, as it were, embodied in one, on whom the psalmist concentrates his thoughts as the most formidable and fierce. The metaphor of the lion is common in the psalms attributed to David, and is, at all events, natural in the mouth of a shepherd king, who had taken a lion by the beard. He is quite aware of his peril, if God does not help him, but he is so sure of his safety, since he trusts, that he can contemplate the enemy's power unmoved, like a man standing within arm's length of the lion's open jaws, but with a strong grating between. This is the blessing of true faith, not the oblivion of dangers, but the calm fronting of them because our refuge is in God.

Indignant repelling of slander follows the first burst of triumphant trust (vv. 3–5). Apparently "the words of Cush" were calumnies poisoning Saul's suspicious

nature, such as David refers to in 1 Sam. xxiv. 9: "Wherefore hearkenest thou to men's words, saying, Behold, David seeketh thy hurt?" The emphatic and enigmatic *This* in ver. 3 is unintelligible, unless it refers to some slander freshly coined, the base malice of which stirs its object into flashing anger and vehement self-vindication. The special point of the falsehood is plain from the repudiation. He had been charged with attempting to injure one who was at peace with him. That is exactly what "men's words" charged on David, "saying, Behold, David seeketh thy hurt" (1 Samuel, as above). "If there be iniquity in my hands" is very like "See that there is neither evil nor transgression in mine hand, and I have not sinned against thee"; "Thou huntest after my soul to take it" (1 Samuel) is also like our ver. 1: "them that pursue me," and ver. 5: "let the enemy pursue my soul and overtake it." The specific form of this protestation of innocence finds no explanation in the now favourite view of the sufferer in the psalm as being the righteous nation. The clause which is usually treated as a parenthesis in ver. 4, and translated, as in the R.V., "I have delivered him that without cause was mine adversary," is needlessly taken by Delitzsch and others as a continuation of the hypothetical clauses, and rendered, with a change in the meaning of the verb, "And if I have despoiled him," etc.; but it is better taken as above and referred to the incident in the cave when David spared Saul's life. What meaning would that clause have with the national reference? The metaphor of a wild beast in chase of its prey colours the vehement declaration in ver. 5 of readiness to suffer if guilty. We see the swift pursuit, the victim overtaken and trampled to death. There may also

be an echo of the Song of Miriam (Exod. xv. 9): "The enemy said, I will pursue; I will overtake." To "lay my glory in the dust" is equivalent to "bring down my soul to the dust of death." Man's glory is his "soul." Thus, nobly throbbing with conscious innocence and fronting unmerited hate, the rush of words stops, to let the musical accompaniment blare on, for a while, as if defiant and confident.

The second section of the psalm (vv. 6–10) is a cry for the coming of the Divine Judge. The previous prayer was content with deliverance, but this takes a bolder flight, and asks for the manifestation of the punitive activity of God on the enemies, who, as usually, are identified with "evil-doers." The grand metaphors in "Arise," "Lift up Thyself," "Awake," mean substantially the same thing. The long periods during which evil works and flaunts with impunity are the times when God sits as if passive and, in a figure still more daring, as if asleep. When His destructive power flashed into act, and some long-tolerated iniquity was smitten at a blow, the Hebrew singers saw therein God springing to His feet or awaking to judgment. Such long stretches of patient permission of evil and of swift punishment are repeated through the ages, and individual lives have them in miniature. The great judgments of nations and the small ones of single men embody the same principles, just as the tiniest crystal has the same angles and lines of cleavage as the greatest of its kind. So this psalmist has penetrated to a true discernment of the relations of the small and the great, when he links his own vindication by the judicial act of God with the pomp and splendour of a world-wide judgment, and bases his prayer for the former on the Divine purpose to effect the latter. The sequence, "The Lord minis-

tereth judgment to the peoples"—therefore—"judge me, O Lord," does not imply that the "me" is the nation, but simply indicates as the ground of the individual hope of a vindicating judgment the Divine fact, of which history had given him ample proof and faith gave him still fuller evidence, that God, though He sometimes seemed to sleep, did indeed judge the nations. The prerogative of the poet, and still more, the instinct of the inspired spirit, is to see the law of the greatest exemplified in the small and to bring every triviality of personal life into contact with God and His government. The somewhat harsh construction of the last clause of ver. 6 begins the transition from the prayer for the smaller to the assurance of the greater judgment which is its basis, and similarly the first clause of ver. 8 closes the picture of that wider act, and the next clause returns to the prayer. This picture, thus embedded in the heart of the supplication, is majestic in its few broad strokes. First comes the appointment of judgment, then the assembling of the "peoples," which here may, perhaps, have the narrower meaning of the "tribes," since "congregation" is the word used for them in their national assembly, and would scarcely be employed for the collection of Gentile nations. But whether the concourse be all Israel or all nations, they are gathered in silent expectance as in a great judgment-hall. Then enters the Judge. If we retain the usual reading and rendering of ver. 7 *b*, the act of judgment is passed over in silence, and the poet beholds God, the judgment finished, soaring above the awe-struck multitudes, in triumphant return to the repose of His heavenly throne. But the slight emendation of the text, needed to yield the meaning "Sit Thou above it," is worthy of con-

sideration. In either case, the picture closes with the repeated assurance of the Divine judgment of the peoples, and (ver. 8) the prayer begins again. The emphatic assertion of innocence must be taken in connection with the slanders already repudiated. The matter in hand is the evils charged on the psalmist, for which he was being chased as if by lions, the judgment craved is the chastisement of his persecutors, and the innocence professed is simply the innocence which they calumniated. The words have no bearing at all on the psalmist's general relation to the Divine law, nor is there any need to have recourse to the hypothesis that the speaker is the "righteous nation." It is much more difficult to vindicate a member of that remnant from the charge of overestimating the extent and quality of even the righteous nation's obedience, if he meant to allege, as that interpretation would make him do, that the nation was pure in life and heart, than it is to vindicate the single psalmist vehemently protesting his innocence of the charges for which he was hunted. Cheyne confesses (Commentary *in loc.*) that the "psalmist's view may seem too rose-coloured," which is another way of acknowledging that the interpretation of the protestation as the voice of the nation is at variance with the facts of its condition.

The accents require ver. 9 *a* to be rendered "Let wickedness make an end of the wicked," but that introduces an irrelevant thought of the suicidal nature of evil. It may be significant that the psalmist's prayer is not for the destruction of the wicked, but of their wickedness. Such annihilation of evil is the great end of God's judgment, and its consequence will be the establishment of the righteous Again the prayer

strengthens itself by the thought of God as righteous and as trying the hearts and reins (the seat of feeling). In the presence of rampant and all but triumphant evil, a man needs to feed hopes of its overthrow that would else seem vainest dreams, by gazing on the righteousness and searching power of God. Very beautifully does the order of the words in ver. 9 suggest the kindred of the good man with God by closing each division of the verse with "righteous." A righteous man has a claim on a righteous God. Most naturally then the prayer ends with the calm confidence of ver. 10: "My shield is upon God." He Himself bears the defence of the psalmist. This confidence he has won by his prayer, and in it he ceases to be a suppliant and becomes a seer.

The last section (ver. 11 to end) is a vision of the judgment prayed for, and may be supposed to be addressed to the enemy. If so, the hunted man towers above them, and becomes a rebuker. The character of God underlies the fact of judgment, as it had encouraged the prayer for it. What he had said to himself when his hope drooped, he now, as a prophet, peals out to men as making retribution sure: "God is a righteous Judge, yea a God that hath indignation every day." The absence of an object specified for the indignation makes its inevitable flow wherever there is evil the more vividly certain. If He is such, then of course follows the destruction of every one who "turns not." Retribution is set forth with solemn vigour under four figures. First, God is as an armed enemy sharpening His sword in preparation for action, a work of time which in the Hebrew is represented as in process, and bending His bow, which is the work of a moment, and in the Hebrew is represented as a completed act. Another

second, and the arrow will whizz. Not only is the bow bent, but (ver. 11) the deadly arrows are aimed, and not only aimed, but continuously fed with flame. The Hebrew puts "At him" (the wicked) emphatically at the beginning of the verse, and uses the form of the verb which implies completed action for the "aiming" and that which implies incomplete for "making" the arrows burn. So the stern picture is drawn of God as in the moment before the outburst of His punitive energy —the sword sharpened, the bow bent, the arrows fitted, the burning stuff being smeared on their tips. What will happen when all this preparation blazes into action?

The next figure in ver. 14 insists on the automatic action of evil in bringing punishment. It is the Old Testament version of "Sin when it is finished bringeth forth death." The evil-doer is boldly represented as "travailing with iniquity," and that metaphor is broken up into the two parts "He hath conceived mischief" and "He hath brought forth falsehood." The "falsehood," which is the thing actually produced, is so called, not because it deceives others, but because it mocks its producer with false hopes and never fulfils his purposes. This is but the highly metaphorical way of saying that a sinner never does what he means to do, but that the end of all his plans is disappointment. The law of the universe condemns him to feed on ashes and to make and trust in lies.

A third figure brings out more fully the idea implied in "falsehood," namely, the failure of evil to accomplish its doer's purpose. Crafty attempts to trap others have an ugly habit of snaring their contriver. The irony of fortune tumbles the hunter into the pitfall dug by him for his prey. The fourth figure (ver. 16)

represents the incidence of his evil on the evil-doer as being certain as the fall of a stone thrown straight up, which will infallibly come back in the line of its ascent. Retribution is as sure as gravitation, especially if there is an Unseen Hand above, which adds impetus and direction to the falling weight. All these metaphors, dealing with the "natural" consequences of evil, are adduced as guarantees of *God's* judgment, whence it is clear both that the psalmist is thinking not of some final future judgment, but of the continuous one of daily providence, and that he made no sharp line of demarcation between the supernatural and the natural. The qualities of things and the play of natural events are God's working.

So the end of all is thanksgiving. A stern but not selfish nor unworthy thankfulness follows judgment, with praise which is not inconsistent with tears of pity, even as the act of judgment which calls it forth is not inconsistent with Divine love. The vindication of God's righteousness is worthily hymned by the choral thanksgivings of all who love righteousness. By judgment Jehovah makes Himself known as "most high," supreme over all creatures; and hence the music of thanksgiving celebrates Him under that name. The title "Elyon" here employed is regarded by Cheyne and others as a sign of late date, but the use of it seems rather a matter of poetic style than of chronology. Melchizedek, Balaam, and the king of Babylon (Isa. xiv. 14) use it; it occurs in Daniel, but, with these exceptions, is confined to poetical passages, and cannot be made out to be a mark of late date, except by assuming the point in question—namely, the late date of the poetry, principally nineteen psalms, in which it occurs.

PSALM VIII.

1 Jehovah, our Lord,
How glorious is Thy name in all the earth!
Who hast set Thy glory upon the heavens.
2 Out of the mouth of children and sucklings hast Thou founded a strength,
Because of Thine adversaries,
To still the enemy and the revengeful.

3 When I gaze on Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers,
Moon and stars, which Thou hast established,
4 What is frail man, that Thou rememberest him,
And the son of man, that Thou visitest him?
5 For Thou didst let him fall but little short of God,
And crownedst him with glory and honour.
6 Thou madest him ruler over the works of Thy hands;
Thou hast put all things under his feet,
7 Sheep and oxen, all of them,
And likewise beasts of the field,
8 Fowl of the heavens and fishes of the sea,
Whatever traverses the paths of the seas.

9 Jehovah, our Lord, how glorious is Thy name in all the earth!

THE exclamation which begins and ends this psalm, enclosing it as a jewel in a setting, determines its theme as being neither the nightly heaven, with all its stars, nor the dignity of man, but the name of the Lord as proclaimed by both. The Biblical contemplation of nature and man starts from and ends in God. The main thought of the psalm is the superiority of the revelation in man's nature and place to that in the vault of heaven. The very smallness of man

makes the revelation of God in His dealings with him great. In his insignificance is lodged a Divine spark, and, lowly as is his head as he stands beneath the midnight sky blazing with inaccessible lights, it is crowned with a halo which reflects God's glory more brightly than does their lustre. That one idea is the theme of both parts of the psalm. In the former (vv. 1, 2) it is briefly stated; in the latter (vv. 3–8) it is wrought out in detail. The movement of thought is by expansion rather than progress.

The name of the Lord is His character as made known. The psalmist looks beyond Israel, the recipient of a fuller manifestation, and, with adoring wonder, sees far-flashing through all the earth, as if written in light, the splendour of that name. The universal revelation in the depths of the sparkling heavens and the special one by which Israel can say, "our Lord," are both recognised. The very abruptness of the exclamation in ver. 1 tells that it is the end of long, silent contemplation, which overflows at last in speech. The remainder of ver. 1 and ver. 2 present the two forms of Divine manifestation which it is the main purpose of the psalm to contrast, and which effect the world-wide diffusion of the glory of the Name. These are the apocalypse in the nightly heavens and the witness from the mouth of babes and sucklings. As to the former, there is some difficulty in the text as it stands; and there may be a question also as to the connection with the preceding burst of praise. The word rendered "hast set" is an imperative, which introduces an incongruous thought, since the psalm proceeds on the conviction that God has already done what such a reading would be asking Him to do. The simplest solution is to suppose a textual corruption, and to

make the slight change required for the rendering of the A.V. and R.V. God's name is glorious in all the earth, first, because He has set His glory upon the heavens, which stretch their solemn magnificence above every land. It is His glory of which theirs is the shimmering reflection, visible to every eye upturned from "this dim spot which men call earth." May we attach significance to the difference between "Thy name" and "Thy glory"? Possibly there is a hint of the relative inferiority even of the heavenly proclamation, inasmuch as, while it rays out "glory," the lustre of power and infinitude, it is only on earth that that revelation becomes the utterance of the Name, since here are hearts and minds to interpret.

The relative at the beginning of the last clause of ver. 1 seems to require that the initial exclamation should not be isolated, as it is in the last verse; but, in any case, the two methods of revelation must be taken in the closest connection, and brought into line as parallel media of revelation.

Ver. 2 gives the second of these. The sudden drop from the glories of the heavens to the babble and prattle of infancy and childhood is most impressive, and gives extraordinary force to the paradox that the latter's witness is more powerful to silence gainsayers than that of the former. This conviction is expressed in a noble metaphor, which is blurred by the rendering "strength." The word here rather means *a strength* in the old use of the term—that is, a stronghold or fortress—and the image, somewhat more daring than colder Western taste finds permissible, is that, out of such frail material as children's speech, God builds a tower of strength, which, like some border castle, will bridle and still the restless enemy. There seems

no sufficient reason for taking "children and sucklings" in any but its natural meaning, however the reference to lowly believers may accord with the spirit of the psalm. The children's voices are taken as a type of feeble instruments, which are yet strong enough to silence the enemy. Childhood, "with no language but a cry," is, if rightly regarded in its source, its budding possibilities, its dependence, its growth, a more potent witness to a more wondrous name than are all the stars. In like manner, man is man's clearest revelation of God. The more lowly he is, the more lofty his testimony. What are all His servants' words but the babbling of children who "do not know half the deep things they speak"? God's strongest fortress is built of weakest stones. The rendering of the LXX., which is that used by our Lord in the Temple when He claimed the children's shrill hosannas as perfected praise, is an explanation rather than a translation, and as such is quite in the line of the psalmist's meaning. To find in the "children and sucklings" a reference either to the humble believers in Israel or to the nation as a whole, and in the "enemy and the vengeful man" hostile nations, introduces thoughts alien to the universality of the psalm, which deals with humanity as a whole and with the great revelations wide as humanity. If the two parts of the psalm are to be kept together, the theme of the compendious first portion must be the same as that of the second, namely, the glory of God as revealed by nature and man, but most chiefly by the latter, notwithstanding and even by his comparative feebleness.

The second part (vv. 3–8) expands the theme of the first. The nightly sky is more overwhelming than the bare blue vault of day. Light conceals and darkness

unveils the solemn glories. The silent depths, the inaccessible splendours, spoke to this psalmist, as they do to all sensitive souls, of man's relative insignificance, but they spoke also of the God whose hand had fashioned them, and the thought of Him carried with it the assurance of His care for so small a creature, and therefore changed the aspect of his insignificance. To an ear deaf to the witness of the heavens to their Maker, the only voice which sounds from their crushing magnificence is one which counsels unmitigated despair, insists on man's nothingness, and mocks his aspirations. If we stop with "What is man?" the answer is, A fleeting nothing. The magnitude, the duration, the multitudes of these awful suns and stars dwarf him. Modern astronomy has so far increased the impression that it has landed many minds in blank unbelief that God has visited so small a speck as earth, and abundant ridicule has been poured on the arrogance which dreams that such stupendous events, as the Christian revelation asserts, have been transacted on earth for man. If we begin with man, certainly his insignificance makes it supremely absurd to suppose him thus distinguished; but if we begin at the other end, the supposition takes a new appearance of probability. If there is a God, and men are His creatures, it is supremely unlikely that He should not have a care of them. Nothing can be more absurd than the supposition of a dumb God, who has never spoken to such a being as man. The psalmist gives full weight to man's smallness, his frailty, and his lowly origin, for his exclamation, "What is man?" means, "How little is he!" and he uses the words which connote frailty and mortality, and emphasise the fact of birth as if in contrast with "the work of Thy fingers"; but all

these points only enhance the wonderfulness of what is to the poet an axiom—that God has personal relations with His creature. "Thou art mindful of him" refers to God's thought, "Thou visitest him" to His acts of loving care; and both point to God's universal beneficence, not to His special revelation. The bitter parody in Job vii. 17, 18, takes the truth by the other handle, and makes the personal relations those of a rigid inspector on the one hand and a creature not worth being so strict with on the other. Mindfulness is only watchfulness for slips, and visiting means penal visitation. So the same fact may be the source of thankful wonder or of almost blasphemous murmuring.

Vv. 5–8 draw out the consequences of God's loving regard, which has made the insignificance of man the medium of a nobler manifestation of the Divine name than streams from all the stars. There is no allusion here to sin; and its absence has led to the assertion that this psalmist knew nothing of a fall, and was not in harmony with the prevalent Old Testament tone as to the condition of humanity. But surely the contemplation of the ideal manhood, as it came from God's hand, does not need to be darkened by the shadows of the actual. The picture of man as God made him is the only theme which concerns the psalmist; and he paints it with colours drawn from the Genesis account, which tells of the fall as well as the creation of man.

The picture contains three elements: man is Deiform, crowned with glory and honour, and lord of the creatures on earth. The rendering "than the angels" in the A.V. comes from the LXX., but though defensible, is less probable than the more lofty conception contained in "than God," which is vindicated, not only by lexical

considerations, but as embodying an allusion to the original creation "in the image of God." What then is the "little" which marks man's inferiority? It is mainly that the spirit, which is God's image, is confined in and limited by flesh, and subject to death. The distance from the apex of creation to the Creator must ever be infinite; but man is so far above the non-sentient, though mighty, stars and the creatures which share earth with him, by reason of his being made in the Divine image—*i.e.*, having consciousness, will, and reason—that the distance is foreshortened. The gulf between man and matter is greater than that between man and God. The moral separation caused by sin is not in the psalmist's mind. Thus man is invested with some reflection of God's glory, and wears this as a crown. He is king on earth.

The enumeration of his subjects follows, in language reminding again of the Genesis narrative. The catalogue begins with those nearest to him, the long-tamed domestic animals, and of these the most submissive (sheep) first; it then passes to the untamed animals, whose home is "the field" or uncultivated land, and from them goes to the heights and depths, where the free fowls of the air and fish of the sea and all the mysterious monsters that may roam the hidden ways of that unknown ocean dwell. The power of taming and disciplining some, the right to use all, belong to man, but his subjects have their rights and their king his limits of power and his duties.

Such then is man, as God meant him to be. Such a being is a more glorious revelation of the Name than all stars and systems. Looked at in regard to his duration, his years are a handbreadth before these shining ancients of days that have seen his generations

fret their little hour and sink into silence; looked at in contrast with their magnitude and numbers numberless, he is but an atom, and his dwelling-place a speck. Science increases the knowledge of his insignificance, but perhaps not the impression of it made on a quiet heart by the simple sight of the heavens. But besides the merely scientific view, and the merely poetic, and the grimly Agnostic, there is the other, the religious, and it is as valid to-day as ever. To it the heavens are the work of God's finger, and their glories are His, set there by Him. That being so, man's littleness magnifies the name, because it enhances the condescending love of God, which has greatened the littleness by such nearness of care and such gifts of dignity. The reflection of His glory which blazes in the heavens is less bright than that which gleams in the crown of glory and honour on man's lowly yet lofty head. The "babe and suckling" of creation has a mouth from which the strength of perfected praise issues and makes a bulwark against all gainsayers.

The use made of this psalm in the Epistle to the Hebrews proceeds on the understanding that it describes ideal humanity. Where, then, says the writer of the epistle, shall we look for the realisation of that ideal? Do not the grand words sound liker irony than truth? Is this poor creature that crawls about the world, its slave, discrowned and sure to die, the Man whom the psalmist saw? No. Then was the fair vision a baseless fabric, and is there nothing to be looked for but a dreary continuance of such abortions dragging out their futile being through hopeless generations? No; the promise shall be fulfilled for humanity, because it has been fulfilled in one Man: the Man Christ Jesus. He is the realised ideal, and in Him is a life which

will be communicated to all who trust and obey Him, and they, too, will become all that God meant man to be. The psalm was not intended as a prophecy, but every clear vision of God's purpose is a prophecy, for none of His purposes remain unfulfilled. It was not intended as a picture of the Christ, but it is so; for He, and He alone, is the Man who answers to that fair Divine Ideal, and He will make all His people partakers of His royalty and perfect manhood.

So the psalm ends, as it began, with adoring wonder, and proclaims this as the result of the twofold witness which it has so nobly set forth: that God's name shines glorious through all the earth, and every eye may see its lustre.

PSALM IX.

1 (א) I will thank Jehovah with my whole heart;
I will recount all Thy wonders.
2 I will be glad and exult in Thee;
I will sing Thy name, Most High,

3 (ב) Because mine enemies turn back;
They stumble and perish at Thy presence.
4 For Thou hast upheld my right and my suit;
Thou didst seat Thyself on Thy throne, judging righteously.

5 (ג) Thou hast rebuked the nations, Thou hast destroyed the wicked;
Thou hast blotted out their name for ever and aye.
6 The enemy—they are ended, [they are] desolations for ever,
And [their] cities hast Thou rooted out; perished is their memory.

7 (ה) They [are perished], but Jehovah shall sit throned for ever;
He hath prepared His throne for judgment.
8 And He—He shall judge the world in righteousness;
He shall deal judgment to the peoples in equity.

9 (ו) And Jehovah shall be a lofty stronghold for the crushed,
A lofty stronghold in times of extremity.
10 And they who know Thy name will put trust in Thee,
For Thou hast not forsaken them that seek Thee, Jehovah.

11 (ז) Sing with the harp to Jehovah, sitting throned in Zion;
Declare among the peoples His doings.
12 For He that makes inquisition for blood has remembered them;
He has not forgotten the cry of the humble.

13 (ח) Have mercy on me, Jehovah;
Look on my affliction from my haters,
Thou who liftest me up from the gates of death
14 To the end that I may recount all Thy praises.
In the gates of the daughter of Zion,
will rejoice in Thy salvation.

15 (ט) The nations are sunk in the pit they made;
In the net which they spread their foot is caught.
16 Jehovah makes Himself known; judgment hath He done,
Snaring the wicked by the work of his own hands. Higgaion; Selah.

17 (י) The wicked shall return to Sheol,
All the nations who forget God.
18 For not for ever shall the needy be forgotten,
Nor the expectation of the afflicted perish for aye.

19 (כ) Arise, Jehovah: let not man grow strong;
Let the nations be judged before Thy presence.
20 Appoint, Jehovah, terrors for them;
Let the nations come to know that they are men.

PSALMS vii. and ix. are connected by the recurrence of the two thoughts of God as the Judge of nations and the wicked falling into the pit which he digged. Probably the original arrangement of the Psalter put these two next each other, and Psalm viii. was inserted later.

Psalm ix. is imperfectly acrostic. It falls into strains of two verses each, which are marked by sequence of thought as well as by the acrostic arrangement. The first begins with Aleph, the second with Beth, and so on, the second verse of each pair not being counted in the scheme. The fourth letter is missing, and ver. 7, which should begin with it, begins with the sixth. But a textual correction, which is desirable on other grounds, makes the fifth letter (He) the initial of ver. 7, and then the regular sequence is kept up till ver. 19, which should begin with the soft K, but takes instead the guttural Q. What has become of the rest of the alphabet? Part of it is found in Psalm x., where the first verse begins with the L, which should follow the regular K for ver. 19. But there is no more trace of acrostic structure in x. till ver. 12, which resumes

it with the Q which has already appeared out of place in ix. 19; and it goes on to the end of the alphabet, with only the irregularity that the R strain (x. 14) has but one verse. Verses with the missing letters would just about occupy the space of the non-acrostic verses in Psalm x., and the suggestion is obvious that the latter are part of some other psalm which has been substituted for the original; but there are links of connection between the non-acrostic and acrostic portions of Psalm x., which make that hypothesis difficult. The resemblances between the two psalms as they stand are close, and the dissimilarities not less obvious. The psalmist's enemies are different. In the former they are foreign, in the latter domestic. Psalm ix. rings with triumph; Psalm x. is in a minor key. The former celebrates a judgment as accomplished which the latter almost despairingly longs to see begun. On the whole, the two were most probably never formally one, but are a closely connected pair.

There is nothing to discredit the Davidic authorship The singer's enemies are "nations," and the destruction of these foreign foes is equivalent to "maintaining his cause." That would be language natural in the mouth of a king, and there were foreign wars enough in David's reign to supply appropriate occasions for such a song. The psalm falls into two parts, vv. 1–12 and 13 to end, of which the second substantially repeats the main thoughts of the first, but with a significant difference. In the first part the sequence is praise and its occasion (Aleph and Beth verses, 1–4), triumphant recounting of accomplished judgment (Gimel verses, 5, 6), confident expectation of future wider judgment (amended He and Vav pairs, vv. 7–10), and a final call to praise (vii. 12). Thus set, as it were, in a circlet

of praise, are experience of past and consequent confidence of future deliverance. The second part gives the same order, only, instead of praise, it has prayer for its beginning and end, the two central portions remaining the same as in part I. The Cheth pair (vv. 13, 14) is prayer, the deliverance not being perfected, though some foes have fallen; the past act of accomplished judgment is again celebrated in the Teth pair (vv. 15, 16), followed, as before, by the triumphant confidence of future complete crushing of enemies (Yod strain, vv. 17, 18); and all closes with prayer (Qoph pair, vv. 19, 20). Thus the same thoughts are twice dwelt on; and the different use made of them is the explanation of the repetition, which strikes a cursory reader as needless. The diamond is turned a little in the hand, and a differently tinted beam flashes from its facet.

In the first pair of verses, the song rushes out like some river breaking through a dam and flashing as it hurries on its course. Each short clause begins with Aleph; each makes the same fervid resolve. Whole-hearted praise is sincere, and all the singer's being is fused into it. "All Thy marvellous works" include the great deliverances of the past, with which a living sense of God's working associates those of the present, as one in character and source. To-day is as full of God to this man as the sacred yesterdays of national history, and his deliverances as wonderful as those of old. But high above the joy in God's work is the joy in Himself to which it leads, and "Thy name, O thou Most High," is the ground of all pure delight and the theme of all worthy praise.

The second stanza (Beth, vv. 3, 4) is best taken as giving the ground of praise. Render in close con-

nection with preceding "*because* mine enemies turn back; they stumble and perish at [or from] Thy presence." God's face blazes out on the foe, and they turn and flee from the field, but in their flight they stumble, and, like fugitives, once fallen can rise no more. The underlying picture is of a battle-field and a disastrous rout. It is God's coming into action that scatters the enemy, as ver. 4 tells by its "for." When He took His seat on the throne (of judgment rather than of royalty), they fled; and that act of assuming judicial activity was the maintaining of the psalmist's cause.

The third pair of verses (Gimel, 5, 6) dwells on the grand picture of judgment, and specifies for the first time the enemies as "the nations" or "heathen," thus showing that the psalmist is not a private individual, and probably implying that the whole psalm is a hymn of victory, in which the heat of battle still glows, but which writes no name on the trophy but that of God. The metaphor of a judgment-seat is exchanged for a triumphant description of the destructions fallen on the land of the enemy, in all which God alone is recognised as the actor. "Thou hast rebuked"; and just as His creative word was all-powerful, so His destructive word sweeps its objects into nothingness. There is a grand and solemn sequence in that "Thou hast rebuked; . . . Thou hast destroyed." His breath has made; His breath can unmake. In ver. 6 the rendering to be preferred is substantially that of the R.V.: "The enemy are ended, [they are] ruins for ever, and cities hast Thou rooted out; perished is their memory." To take "enemy" as a vocative breaks the continuity of the address to God, and brings in an irrelevant reference to the former conquests of the foe ("Thou hast destroyed

cities") which is much more forcible if regarded as descriptive of God's destruction of his cities. "Their memory" refers to the enemy, not to the cities. Utter, perpetual ruin, so complete that the very name is forgotten, has fallen on the foe.

In the fourth pair of verses a slight emendation of the text is approved of by most critics. The last word of ver. 6 is the pronoun "they," which, though possible in such a position, is awkward. If it is transferred to the beginning of ver. 7, and it is further supposed that "are perished" has dropped out, as might easily be the case, from the verb having just occurred in the singular, a striking antithesis is gained: "They perish, but Jehovah shall sit," etc. Further, the pair of verses then begins with the fifth letter; and the only irregularity in the acrostic arrangement till ver. 19 is the omission of the fourth letter: Daleth. A very significant change in tenses takes place at this point. Hitherto the verbs have been perfects, implying a finished act; that is to say, hitherto the psalm has been dealing with facts of recent but completed experience. Now the verbs change to imperfects or futures, and continue so till ver. 12; that is to say, "experience doth attain to something of prophetic strain," and passes into confidence for the future. That confidence is cast in the mould supplied by the deliverance on which it is founded. The smaller act of judgment, which maintained the psalmist's cause, expands into a world-wide judgment in righteousness, for which the preparations are already made. "He hath prepared His throne for judgment" is the only perfect in the series. This is the true point of view from which to regard the less comprehensive acts of judgment thinly sown through history, when God has arisen to smite some

hoary iniquity or some godless conqueror. Such acts are premonitions of the future, and every "day of the Lord" is a miniature of that final *dies iræ*. The psalmist probably was rather thinking of other acts of judgment which would free him and his people from hostile nations, but his hope was built on the great truth that all such acts are prophecies of others like them, and it is a legitimate extension of the same principle to view them all in relation to the last and greatest of the series.

The fifth pair (Vav stanza, vv. 9, 10) turns to the glad contemplation of the purpose of all the pomp and terror of the judgment thus hoped for. The Judge is seated on high, and His elevation makes a "lofty stronghold" for the crushed or downtrodden.

The rare word rendered "extremity" in ver. 9 occurs only here and in x. 1. It means a cutting off, *i.e.*, of hope of deliverance. The notion of distress intensified to despair is conveyed. God's judgments show that even in such extremity He is an inexpugnable defence, like some hill fortress, inaccessible to any foe. A further result of judgment is the (growing) trust of devout souls (ver. 10). To "know Thy name" is here equivalent to learning God's character as made known by His acts, especially by the judgments anticipated. For such knowledge some measure of devout trust is required, but further knowledge deepens trust. The best teacher of faith is experience; and, on the other hand, the condition of such experience is faith. The action of knowledge and of trust is reciprocal. That trust is reinforced by the renewed evidence, afforded by the judgments, that Jehovah does not desert them that seek Him. To "seek Him" is to long for Him, to look for His help in trouble, to turn

with desire and obedience to Him in daily life; and anything is possible rather than that He should not disclose and give Himself to such search. Trust and seeking, fruition and desire, the repose of the soul on God and its longing after God, are inseparable. They are but varying aspects of the one thing. When a finite spirit cleaves to the infinite God, there must be longing as an element in all possession and possession as an element in all longing; and both will be fed by contemplation of the self-revealing acts which are the syllables of His name.

Section 6, the last of the first part (Zayin, vv. 11, 12), circles round to section 1, and calls on all trusters and seekers to be a chorus to the solo of praise therein. The ground of the praise is the same past act which has been already set forth as that of the psalmist's thanksgiving, as is shown by the recurrence here of perfect tenses (*hath remembered; hath not forgotten*). The designation of God as "dwelling" in Zion is perhaps better rendered, with allusion to the same word in ver. 7, "sitteth." His seat had been there from the time that the Ark was brought thither. That earthly throne was the type of His heavenly seat, and from Zion He is conceived as executing judgment. The world-wide destination of Israel's knowledge of God inspires the call to "show forth His doings" to "the peoples." The "nations" are not merely the objects of destructive wrath, but are to be summoned to share in the blessing of knowing His mighty acts. The psalmist may not have been able to harmonise these two points of view as to Israel's relation to the Gentile world, but both thoughts vibrate in his song. The designation of God as "making inquisition for blood" thinks of Him as the Goel, or Avenger. To

seek means here to demand back as one who had entrusted property to another who had destroyed it would do, thence to demand compensation or satisfaction, and thus finally comes to mean to avenge or punish (so Hupfeld, Delitzsch, etc.). "The poor" or "meek" (R.V. and margin) whose cry is heard are the devout portion of the Jewish people, who are often spoken of in the Psalms and elsewhere as a class.

The second part of the psalm begins with ver. 13. The prayer in that verse is the only trace of trouble in the psalm. The rest is triumph and exultation. This, at first sight discordant, note has sorely exercised commentators; and the violent solution that the whole Cheth stanza (vv. 13, 14) should be regarded as "the cry of the meek," quoted by the psalmist, and therefore be put in inverted commas (though adopted by Delitzsch and Cheyne), is artificial and cold. If the view of the structure of the psalm given above is adopted, there is little difficulty in the connection. The victory has been completed over certain enemies, but there remain others; and the time for praise unmingled with petition has not yet come for the psalmist, as it never comes for any of us in this life. Quatre Bras is won, but Waterloo has to be fought to-morrow. The prayer takes account of the dangers still threatening, but it only glances at these, and then once more turns to look with hope on the accomplished deliverance. The thought of how God had lifted the suppliant up from the very gates of death heartens him to pray for all further mercy needed. Death is the lord of a gloomy prison-house, the gates of which open inwards only and permit no egress. On its very threshold the psalmist had stood. But God had lifted him thence, and the remembrance wings his prayer. "The gates

of the daughter of Zion" are in sharp, happy contrast with the frowning portals of death. A city's gates are the place of cheery life, stir, gossip, business. Anything proclaimed there flies far. There the psalmist resolves that he will tell his story of rescue, which he believes was granted that it might be told. God's purpose in blessing men is that they may open their lips to proclaim the blessings and so bring others to share in them. God's end is the spread of His name, not for any good to Him, but because to know it is life to us.

The Teth pair (vv. 15, 16) repeats the thoughts of the Gimel stanza (5, 6), recurring to the same significant perfects and dwelling on the new thought that the destruction of the enemy was self-caused. As in Psalm vii., the familiar figure of the pitfall catching the hunter expresses the truth that all evil, and especially malice, recoils on its contriver. A companion illustration is added of the fowler's (or hunter's) foot being caught in his own snare. Ver. 16 presents the other view of retribution, which was the only one in vv. 5, 6, namely that it is a Divine act. It is God who executes judgment, and who "snareth the wicked," though it be "the work of his own hands" which weaves the snare. Both views are needed for the complete truth. This close of the retrospect of deliverance which is the main motive of the psalm is appropriately marked by the musical direction "Higgaion. Selah," which calls for a strain of instrumental music to fill the pause of the song and to mark the rapture of triumph in accomplished deliverance.

The Yod stanza (vv. 17, 18), like the He and Vav stanzas (vv. 7–10), passes to confidence for the future. The correspondence is very close, but the two verses of this stanza represent the four of the earlier ones;

thus ver. 17 answers to vv. 7 and 8, while ver. 18 is the representative of vv. 9 and 10. In ver. 17 the "return to Sheol" is equivalent to destruction. In one view, men who cease to be may be regarded as going back to original nothingness, as in Psalm xc. 3. Sheol is not here a place of punishment, but is the dreary dwelling of the dead, from the gates of which the psalmist had been brought up. Reduction to nothingness and yet a shadowy, dim life or death-in-life will certainly be the end of the wicked. The psalmist's experience in his past deliverance entitles him to generalise thus. To forget God is the sure way to be forgotten. The reason for the certain destruction of the nations who forget God and for the psalmist's assurance of it is (ver. 18) the confidence he has that "the needy shall not always be forgotten." That confidence corresponds precisely to vv. 9, 10, and also looks back to the "hath remembered" and "not forgotten" of ver. 12. They who remember God are remembered by Him; and their being remembered —*i.e.*, by deliverance—necessitates the wicked's being forgotten, and those who are forgotten by God perish. The second clause of ver. 18 echoes the other solemn word of doom from vv. 3–6. There the fate of the evil-doers was set forth as "perishing"; their very memory was to "perish." But the "expectation of the poor shall not perish." Apparently fragile and to the eye of sense unsubstantial as a soap-bubble, the devout man's hope is more solid than the most solid-seeming realities, and will outlast them all.

The final stanza (vv. 19, 20) does not take Kaph as it should do, but Qoph. Hence some critics suspect that this pair of verses has been added by another hand, but the continuity of sense is plain, and is against

this supposition. The psalmist was not so bound to his form but that he could vary it, as here. The prayer of this concluding stanza circles round to the prayer in ver. 13, as has been noticed, and so completes the whole psalm symmetrically. The personal element in ver. 13 has passed away; and the prayer is general, just as the solo of praise in ver. 1 broadened into the call for a chorus of voices in ver. 12. The scope of the prayer is the very judgment which the previous stanza has contemplated as certain. The devout man's desires are moulded on God's promises, and his prayers echo these. "Let not mortal man grow strong," or rather "vaunt his strength." The word for *man* here connotes weakness. How ridiculous for him, being such as he is, to swell and swagger as if strong, and how certain his boasted strength is to shrivel like a leaf in the fire, if God should come forth, roused to action by his boasting! Ver. 20 closes the prayer with the cry that some awe-inspiring act of Divine justice may be flashed before the "nations," in order to force the conviction of their own weakness home to them. "Set terror for them," the word *terror* meaning not the emotion, but the object which produces it, namely an act of judgment such as the whole psalm has had in view. Its purpose is not destruction, but conviction, the wholesome consciousness of weakness, out of which may spring the recognition of their own folly and of God's strength to bless. So the two parts of the psalm end with the thought that the "nations" may yet come to know the name of God, the one calling upon those who have experienced His deliverance to "declare among the peoples His doings," the other praying God to teach by chastisement what nations who forget Him have failed to learn from mercies.

PSALM X.

1 (ל) Why, Jehovah, dost Thou stand far off?
Why veilest [Thine eyes] in times of extremity?
2 Through the pride of the wicked the afflicted is burned away;
They are taken in the plots which these have devised.

3 For the wicked boasts of his soul's desire,
And the rapacious man renounces, contemns, Jehovah.
4 The wicked, by (lit., according to) the uplifting of his nostrils
[says,] He will not inquire;
There is no God, is all his thought.

5 His ways are stable at all times;
High above [him] are Thy judgments, remote from before him;
His adversaries—he snorts at them.

6 He says in his heart, I shall not be moved;
To generation after generation, [I am he] who never falls into
adversity.
7 Of cursing his mouth is full, and deceits, and oppression;
Under his tongue are mischief and iniquity.

8 He couches in the hiding-places of the villages;
In secret he slays the innocent;
His eyes watch the helpless.

9 He lies in wait in secret, like a lion in his lair;
He lies in wait to seize the afflicted;
He seizes the afflicted, dragging him in his net.

10 He crouches, he bows down,
And there falls into his strong [claws] the helpless.
11 He says in his heart, God forgets;
He hides His face, He will not ever see it.

12 (ק) Rise! Jehovah, God! lift up Thy hand!
Forget not the afflicted.
13 Wherefore does the wicked blaspheme God,
[And] say in his heart, Thou wilt not inquire?

14 (ר) Thou hast seen, for Thou, Thou dost behold mischief and
trouble, to take it into Thy hand;
To Thee the helpless leaves himself;
The orphan, Thou, Thou hast been his Helper.

15 ( ) Break the arm of the wicked;
As for the evil man, inquire for his wickedness [till] Thou find
none.
16 Jehovah is King for ever and aye;
The nations are perished out of the land.

17 (ת) The desire of the meek Thou hast heard, Jehovah;
Thou wilt prepare their heart, wilt make Thine ear attentive
18 To do judgment for the orphan and downtrodden;
Terrible no more shall the man of the earth be.

PSALMS ix. and x. are alike in their imperfectly acrostic structure, the occurrence of certain phrases —*e.g.*, the very uncommon expression for "times of trouble" (ix. 9; x. 1), "Arise, O Lord" (ix. 19; x. 12)— and the references to the nations' judgment. But the differences are so great that the hypothesis of their original unity is hard to accept. As already remarked, the enemies are different. The tone of the one psalm is jubilant thanksgiving for victory won and judgment effected; that of the other is passionate portraiture of a rampant foe and cries for a judgment yet unmanifested. They are a pair, though why the psalmist should have bound together two songs of which the unlikenesses are at least as great as the likenesses it is not easy to discover. The circumstances of his day may have brought the cruelty of domestic robbers close upon the heels of foreign foes, as is often the case, but that is mere conjecture.

The acrostic structure is continued into Psalm x., as if the last stanza of ix. had begun with the regular Kaph instead of the cognate Qoph; but it then disappears till ver. 12, from which point it continues to

the end of the psalm, with the anomaly that one of the four stanzas has but one verse: the unusually long verse 14. These four stanzas are allotted to the four last letters of the alphabet. Six letters are thus omitted, to which twelve verses should belong. The nine non-acrostic verses (3–11) are by some supposed to be substituted for the missing twelve, but there are too many verbal allusions to them in the subsequent part of the psalm to admit of their being regarded as later than it. Why, then, the break in the acrostic structure? It is noticeable that the (acrostic) psalm ix. is wholly addressed to God, and that the parts of x. which are addressed to Him are likewise acrostic, the section vv. 3–11 being the vivid description of the "wicked," for deliverance from whom the psalmist prays. The difference of theme may be the solution of the difference of form, which was intended to mark off the prayer stanzas and to suggest, by the very continuity of the alphabetical scheme and the allowance made for the letters which do not appear, the calm flow of devotion and persistency of prayer throughout the parenthesis of oppression. The description of the "wicked" is as a black rock damming the river, but it flows on beneath and emerges beyond.

The psalm falls into two parts after the introductory verse of petition and remonstrance: vv. 3–11, the grim picture of the enemy of the "poor"; and vv. 12–18, the cry for deliverance and judgment.

The first stanza (vv. 1, 2) gives in its passionate cry a general picture of the situation, which is entirely different from that of Psalm ix. The two opposite characters, whose relations occupy so much of these early psalms, "the wicked" and "the poor," are, as usual, hunter and hunted, and God is passive, as if far

away, and hiding His eyes. The voice of complaining but devout remonstrance is singularly like the voice of arrogant godlessness (vv. 4–11), but the fact which brings false security to the one moves the other to prayer. The boldness and the submissiveness of devotion are both throbbing in that "Why?" and beneath it lies the entreaty to break this apparent apathy. Ver. 2 spreads the facts of the situation before God. "Through the pride of the wicked the afflicted is burned," *i.e.*, with anguish, *pride* being the fierce fire and *burning* being a vigorous expression for anguish, or possibly for destruction. The ambiguous next clause may either have "the wicked" or "the poor" for its subject. If the former (R.V.), it is a prayer that the retribution which has been already spoken of in Psalm ix. may fall, but the context rather suggests the other construction, carrying on the description of the sufferings of the poor, with an easy change to the plural, since the singular is a collective. This, then, being how things stand, the natural flow of thought would be the continuance of the prayer; but the reference to the enemy sets the psalmist on fire, and he "burns" in another fashion, flaming out into a passionate portraiture of the wicked, which is marked as an interruption to the current of his song by the cessation of the acrostic arrangement.

The picture is drawn with extraordinary energy, and describes first the character (vv. 3–6) and then the conduct of the wicked. The style reflects the vehemence of the psalmist's abhorrence, being full of gnarled phrases and harsh constructions. As with a merciless scalpel the inner heart of the man is laid open. Observe the recurrence of "saith," "thoughts," and "saith in his heart." But first comes a feature of character which is

open and palpable. He "boasts of his soul's desire." What is especially flagrant in that? The usual explanation is that he is not ashamed of his shameful lusts, but glories in them, or that he boasts of succeeding in all that he desires. But what will a good man do with his heart's desires? Ver. 7 tells us, namely breathe them to God; and therefore to boast of them instead is the outward expression of godless self-confidence and resolve to consult inclination and not God. The word rendered *boast* has the two significations of *pray* and *boast*, and the use of it here, in the worse one, is parallel with the use of *bless* or *renounce* in the next clause. The wicked is also "rapacious," for "covetous" is too weak. He grasps all that he can reach by fair or foul means. Such a man in effect and by his very selfish greed "renounces, contemns God." He may be a worshipper; but his "blessing" is like a parting salutation, dismissing Him to whom it is addressed. There is no need to suppose that conscious apostacy is meant. Rather the psalmist is laying bare the under-meaning of the earth-bound man's life, and in effect anticipates Christ's "Ye cannot serve God and mammon" and Paul's "covetousness which is idolatry."

The next trait of character is practical atheism and denial of Divine retribution. The Hebrew is rough and elliptical, but the A.V. misses its point, which the R.V. gives by the introduction of "saith." "The pride of his countenance" is literally "the elevation of his nose." Translate those upturned nostrils into words, and they mean that God will not require (seek, in the sense of punish). But a God who does not punish is a dim shape, through which the empty sky is seen, and the denial (or forgetfulness) of God's retri-

butive judgment is equivalent to denying that there is a God at all.

Thus armed, the wicked is in fancied security. "His ways are firm"—*i.e.*, he prospers—and, in the very madness of arrogance, he scoffs at God's judgments as too high up to be seen. His scoff is a truth, for how can eyes glued to earth see the solemn lights that move in the heavens? Purblind men say, We do not see them, and mean, They are not; but all that their speech proves is their own blindness. Defiant of God, he is truculent to men, and "snorts contempt at his enemies." "In his heart he says, I shall not be moved." The same words express the sane confidence of the devout soul and the foolish presumption of the man of the earth; but the one says, "because He is at my right hand," and the other trusts in himself. "To all generations I shall not be in adversity" (R.V.). The Hebrew is gnarled and obscure; and attempts to amend the text have been made (compare Cheyne, Grätz *in loc.*), but needlessly. The confidence has become almost insane, and has lost sight altogether of the brevity of life. "His inward thought is that he shall continue for ever" (Psalm xlix.). "Pride stifles reason. The language of the heart cannot be translated into spoken words without seeming exaggeration" (Cheyne). He who can be so blind to facts as to find no God may well carry his blindness a step further and wink hard enough to see no death, or may live as if he did not.

Following the disclosure of the inner springs of life in the secret thoughts comes, in vv. 7–10, the outcome of these in word and deed. When the wicked "lets the rank tongue blossom into speech," the product is affronts to God and maledictions, lies, mischiefs, for men These stuff the mouth full, and lie under the tongue

as sweet morsels for the perverted taste or as stored there, ready to be shot out. The deeds match the words. The vivid picture of a prowling lion seems to begin in ver. 8, though it is sometimes taken as the unmetaphorical description of the wicked man's crime. The stealthy couching of the beast of prey, hiding among the cover round the unwalled village or poorly sheltered fold, the eyes gleaming out of the darkness and steadfastly fixed on the victim with a baleful light in them, belong to the figure, which is abruptly changed in one clause (ver. 9 *c*) into that of a hunter with his net, and then is resumed and completed in ver. 10, where the R.V. is, on the whole, to be preferred —"He croucheth; he boweth down"—as resuming the figure at the point where it had been interrupted and finishing it in the next clause, with the helpless victim fallen into the grip of the strong claws. With great emphasis the picture is rounded off (ver. 11) with the repetition of the secret thought of God's forgetfulness, which underlies the cruel oppression.

This whole section indicates a lawless condition in which open violence, robbery, and murder were common. In Hosea's vigorous language, "blood touched blood," the splashes being so numerous that they met, and the land was red with them. There is no reason to suppose that the picture is ideal or exaggerated. Where in the turbulent annals of Israel it is to be placed must remain uncertain; but that it is a transcript of bitter experience is obvious, and the aspect which it presents should be kept in view as a corrective of the tendency to idealise the moral condition of Israel, which at no time was free from dark stains, and which offered only too many epochs of disorganisation in which the dark picture of the psalm could have been photographed from life.

The phrases for the victims in this section are noteworthy: "the innocent"; "the helpless"; "the poor." Of these the first and last are frequent, and the meaning obvious. There is a doubt whether the last should be regarded as the designation of outward condition or of disposition, *i.e.* whether "meek" or "poor" is the idea. There are two cognate words in Hebrew, one of which means one who is bowed down, *i.e.* by outward troubles, and the other one who bows himself down, *i.e.* is meek. The margin of the Hebrew Bible is fond of correcting these words when they occur in the text and substituting the one for the other, but arbitrarily; and it is doubtful whether in actual usage there is any real distinction between them. "Helpless" is a word only found in this psalm (vv. 8, 10, 14), which has received various explanations, but is probably derived from a root meaning *to be black*, and hence comes to mean *miserable*, *hapless*, or the like. All the designations refer to a class—namely, the devout minority, the true Israel within Israel—and hence the plurals in vv. 10, 12, and 17.

The second part of the psalm (ver. 12 to end) is the prayer, forced from the heart of the persecuted remnant, God's little flock in the midst of wolves. No trace of individual reference appears in it, nor any breath of passion or vengeance, such as is found in some of the psalms of persecution; but it glows with indignation at the blasphemies which are, for the moment, triumphant, and cries aloud to God for a judicial act which shall shatter the dream that He does not see and will not requite. That impious boast, far more than the personal incidence of sufferings, moves the prayer. As regards its form, the reappearance of the acrostic arrangement is significant, as is the repetition of the

prayer and letter of ix. 19, which binds the two psalms together. The acrostic reappears with the direct address to God. The seven verses of the prayer are divided by it into four groups, one of which is abnormal as containing but one verse, the unusual length of which, however, somewhat compensates for the irregularity (ver. 14). The progress of thought in them follows the logic of emotional prayer rather than of the understanding. First, there are a vehement cry for God's intervention and a complaint of His mysterious apparent apathy. The familiar figure for the Divine flashing forth of judgment, "Arise, O Lord," is intensified by the other cry that He would "lift His hand." A God who has risen from His restful throne and raised His arm is ready to bring it down with a shattering blow; but before it falls the psalmist spreads in God's sight the lies of the scornful men. They had said (ver. 11) that He forgot; the prayer pleads that He would not forget. Their confidence was that He did not see nor would requite; the psalmist is bold to ask the reason for the apparent facts which permit such a thought. The deepest reverence will question God in a fashion which would be daring, if it were not instinct with the assurance of the clearness of His Divine knowledge of evil and of the worthiness of the reasons for its impunity. "Wherefore doest Thou thus?" may be insolence or faith. Next, the prayer centres itself on the facts of faith, which sense does not grasp (ver. 14). The specific acts of oppression which force out the psalmist's cry are certainly "seen" by God, for it is His very nature to look on all such ("Thou" in ver. 14 is emphatic); and faith argues from the character to the acts of God and from the general relation of all sin towards Him to that which at

present afflicts the meek. But is God's gaze on the evil an idle look? No; He sees, and the sight moves Him to act. Such is the force of "to take it into Thy hand," which expresses the purpose and issue of the beholding. What He sees He "takes in hand," as we say, with a similar colloquialism. If a man believes these things about God, it will follow of course that he will leave himself in God's hand, that uplifted hand which prayer has moved. So ver. 14 is like a great picture in two compartments, as Raphael's Transfiguration. Above is God, risen with lifted arm, beholding and ready to strike; beneath is the helpless man, appealing to God by the very act of "leaving" himself to Him. That absolute reliance has an all-prevalent voice which reaches the Divine heart, as surely as her child's wail the mother's; and wherever it is exercised the truth of faith which the past has established becomes a truth of experience freshly confirmed. The form of the sentence in the Hebrew (the substantive verb with a participle, "Thou hast been helping") gives prominence to the continuousness of the action: It has always been Thy way, and it is so still. Of course "fatherless" here is tantamount to the "hapless," or poor, of the rest of the psalm.

Then at last comes the cry for the descent of God's uplifted hand (vv. 15, 16). It is not invoked to destroy, but simply to "break the arm" of, the wicked, *i.e.* to make him powerless for mischief, as a swordsman with a shattered arm is. One blow from God's hand lames, and the arm hangs useless. The impious denial of the Divine retribution still affects the psalmist with horror; and he returns to it in the second clause of ver. 15, in which he prays that God would "seek out"—*i.e.*, require and requite, so as to abolish

and make utterly non-existent—the wicked man's wickedness. The yearning of every heart that beats in sympathy with and devotion to God, especially when it is tortured by evil experienced or beheld flourishing unsmitten, is for its annihilation. There is no prayer here for the destruction of the doer; but the reduction to nothingness of his evil is the worthy aspiration of all the good, and they who have no sympathy with such a cry as this have either small experience of evil, or a feeble realisation of its character.

The psalmist was heartened to pray his prayer, because "the nations are perished out of His land." Does that point back to the great instance of exterminating justice in the destruction of the Canaanites? It may do so, but it is rather to be taken as referring to the victories celebrated in the companion psalm. Note the recurrence of the words "nations" and "perished," which are drawn from it. The connection between the two psalms is thus witnessed, and the deliverance from foreign enemies, which is the theme of Psalm ix., is urged as a plea with God and taken as a ground of confidence by the psalmist himself for the completion of the deliverance by making domestic oppressors powerless. This lofty height of faith is preserved in the closing stanza, in which the agitation of the first part and the yearning of the second are calmed into serene assurance that the *Ecclesia pressa* has not cried nor ever can cry in vain. Into the praying, trusting heart "the peace of God, which passeth understanding," steals, and the answer is certified to faith long before it is manifest to sense. To pray and immediately to feel the thrilling consciousness, "Thou hast heard," is given to those who pray in faith. The wicked makes a boast of his "desire"; the humble makes

a prayer of it, and so has it fulfilled. Desires which can be translated into petitions will be converted into fruition. If the heart is humble, that Divine breath will be breathed over and into it which will prepare it to desire only what accords with God's will, and the prepared heart will always find God's ear open. The cry of the *hapless*, which has been put into their lips by God Himself, is the appointed prerequisite of the manifestations of Divine judgment which will relieve the earth of the incubus of "the man of the earth." "Shall not God avenge His own elect, though He bear long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily." The prayer of the humble, like a whisper amid the avalanches, has power to start the swift, white destruction on its downward path; and when once that gliding mass has way on it, nothing which it smites can stand.

PSALM XL.

1 In Jehovah have I taken refuge;
How say ye to my soul,
Flee to the mountain as a bird?
2 For lo, the wicked bend the bow,
They make ready their arrow upon the string,
To shoot in the dark at those who are upright of heart.
3 For the foundations are being destroyed;
The righteous—what hath he achieved?

4 Jehovah in His holy palace, Jehovah, whose throne is in heaven—
His eyes behold, His eyelids try, the children of men.
5 Jehovah trieth the righteous,
But the wicked and lover of violence His soul hateth.
6 May He rain upon the wicked snares;
Fire and brimstone and a burning wind be the portion of their cup!
7 For Jehovah is righteous: righteous deeds He loveth;
The upright shall behold His face.

THE correctness of the superscription is, in the present case, defended by Ewald and Hitzig. Delitzsch refers the psalm to the eve of Absalom's conspiracy, while other supporters of the Davidic authorship prefer the Sauline persecution. The situation as described in the psalm corresponds sufficiently well to either of these periods, in both of which David was surrounded by stealthy hostility and counselled by prudence to flight. But there are no definite marks of date in the psalm itself; and all that is certain is its many affinities with the other psalms of the group which Cheyne calls the "persecution psalms," including

iii.–vii., ix.–xiv., xvii. These resemblances make a common authorship probable.

The structure of the psalm is simple and striking. There are two vividly contrasted halves; the first gives the suggestions of timid counsellors who see only along the low levels of earth, the second the brave answer of faith which looks up into heaven.

In the first part (vv. 1–3) the psalmist begins with an utterance of faith, which makes him recoil with wonder and aversion from the cowardly, well-meant counsels of his friends. "In Jehovah have I taken refuge"—a profession of faith which in Psalm vii. 1 was laid as the basis of prayer for deliverance and is here the ground for steadfastly remaining where he stands. The metaphor of flight to a stronghold, which is in the word for trust, obviously colours the context, for what can be more absurd than that he who has sought and found shelter in God Himself should listen to the whisperings of his own heart or to the advice of friends and hurry to some other hiding-place? "He that believeth shall not make haste," and, even when the floods come, shall not need to seek in wild hurry for an asylum above the rising waters. Safe in God, the psalmist wonders why such counsel should be given, and his question expresses its irrationality and his rejection of it. But these timid voices spoke to his "soul," and the speakers are undefined. Is he apostrophising his own lower nature? Have we here a good man's dialogue with himself? Were there two voices in him: the voice of sense, which spoke to the soul, and that of the soul, which spoke authoritatively to sense? Calvin finds here the mention of *spirituales luctas*; and whether there were actual counsellors of flight or no, no doubt prudence and fear said to and in his soul, "Flee."

If we might venture to suppose that the double thought of the oneness of the psalmist's personality and the manifoldness of his faculties was in his mind, we should have an explanation of the strange fluctuation between singulars and plurals in ver. 1 *b*. "Flee" is plural, but is addressed to a singular subject: "my soul"; "your" is also plural, and "bird" singular. The Hebrew marginal correction smooths away the first anomaly by reading the singular imperative, but that leaves the anomaly in "your." The LXX. and other old versions had apparently a slightly different text, which got rid of that anomaly by reading (with the addition of one letter and a change in the division of words), "Flee to the mountain as a bird"; and that is probably the best solution of the difficulty. One can scarcely fail to recall the comparison of David to a partridge hunted on the mountains. Cheyne finds in the plurals a proof that "it is the Church within the Jewish nation of which the poet thinks." The timid counsel is enforced by two considerations: the danger of remaining a mark for the stealthy foe and the nobler thought of the hopelessness of resistance, and therefore the quixotism of sacrificing one's self in a prolongation of it.

The same figure employed in Psalm vii. 12 of God's judgments on the wicked is here used of the wicked's artillery against the righteous. The peril is imminent, for the bows are bent, and the arrows already fitted to the string. In midnight darkness the assault will be made (compare lxiv. 3, 4). The appeal to the instinct of self-preservation is reinforced by the consideration (ver. 3) of the impotence of efforts to check the general anarchy. The particle at the beginning of the verse is best taken as in the same sense as at the beginning

of ver. 2, thus introducing a second co-ordinate reason for the counsel. The translation of it as hypothetical or temporal (if or when) rather weakens the urgency of ver. 3 as a motive for flight. The probably exaggerated fears of the advisers, who are still speaking, are expressed in two short, breathless sentences: "The foundations [of society] are being torn down; the righteous—what has he achieved?" or possibly, "What can he do?" In either case, the implication is, Why wage a hopeless conflict any longer at the peril of life? All is lost; the wise thing to do is to run. It is obvious that this description of the dissolution of the foundations of the social order is either the exaggeration of fear, or poetic generalisation from an individual case (David's), or refers the psalm to some time of anarchy, when things were much worse than even in the time of Saul or Absalom.

All these suggestions may well represent the voice of our own fears, the whispers of sense and sloth, which ever dwell on and exaggerate the perils in the road of duty, and bid us abandon resistance to prevailing evils as useless and betake ourselves to the repose and security of some tempting nest far away from strife. But such counsels are always base, and though they be the result of "prudence," are short-sighted, and leave out precisely the determining factor in the calculation. The enemy may have fitted his arrows to the string, but there is another bow bent which will be drawn before his (Psalm vii. 12). The foundations are not being destroyed, however many and strong the arms that are trying to dig them up. The righteous has done much, and can do more, though his work seem wasted. Self-preservation is not a man's first duty; flight is his last. Better and wiser and in-

finitely nobler to stand a mark for the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" and to stop at our post, though we fall there, better infinitely to toil on, even when toil seems vain, than cowardly to keep a whole skin at the cost of a wounded conscience or despairingly to fling up work, because the ground is hard and the growth of the seed imperceptible. Prudent advices, when the prudence is only inspired by sense, are generally foolish; and the only reasonable attitude is obstinate hopefulness and brave adherence to duty.

So the psalm turns, in its second part, from these creeping counsels, which see but half the field of vision, and that the lower, to soar and gaze on the upper half. "God is in heaven; all's right with the world," and with the good men who are trying to help to make it right. The poet opposes to the picture drawn by fear the vision of the opened heaven and the throned Jehovah. In ver. 4 the former part is not to be taken as a separate affirmation: "The Lord is," etc., but "Jehovah" is a nominative absolute, and the weight of the sentence falls on the last clause. The "holy palace" in which Jehovah is beheld enthroned is not on earth, as the parallelism of the clauses shows. To the eyes that have seen that vision and before which it ever burns, all earthly sorrows and dangers seem small. There is the true asylum of the hunted soul; that is the mountain to which it is wise to flee. If the faint-hearted had seen that sight, their timid counsels would have caught a new tone. They are preposterous to him who does see it. For not only does he behold Jehovah enthroned, but he sees Him scrutinising all men's acts. We bring the eyelids close when minutely examining any small thing. So God is by a bold figure represented as doing, and the word for "beholds"

has *to divide* as its root idea, and hence implies a keen discriminating gaze. As fire tries metal, so He tries men. And the result of the trial is twofold, as is described in the two clauses of ver. 5, which each require to be completed from the other: "The Lord trieth the righteous (and finding him approved, loveth), but the wicked" (He trieth, and finding him base metal), His soul "hateth." In the former clause the process of trial is mentioned, and its result omitted; in the latter the process is omitted, and the result described. The strong anthropomorphism which attributes a "soul" to God and "hatred" to His soul is not to be slurred over as due to the imperfection of Hebrew ideas of the Divine nature. There is necessarily in the Divine nature an aversion to evil and to the man who has so completely given himself over to it as to "love" it. Such perverted love can only have turned to it that side of the Divine character which in gravity of disapprobation and recoil from evil answers to what we call hate, but neither desires to harm nor is perturbed by passion. The New Testament is as emphatic as the Old in asserting the reality of "the wrath of God." But there are limitation and imperfection in this psalm in that it does not transcend the point of view which regards man's conduct as determining God's attitude. Retribution, not forgiveness nor the possibility of changing the moral bias of character, is its conception of the relations of man and God.

The Divine estimate, which in ver. 5 is the result of God's trial of the two classes, is carried forward in vv. 6 and 7 to its twofold issues. But the form of ver. 6 is that of a wish, not of a prediction; and here again we encounter the tone which, after all allowances, must be regarded as the result of the lower stage of

revelation on which the psalmist stood, even though personal revenge need not be ascribed to him. In the terrible picture of the judgment poured down from the open heavens into which the singer has been gazing, there is a reproduction of the destruction of the cities of the plain, the fate of which stands in the Old Testament as the specimen and prophecy of all subsequent acts of judgment. But the rain from heaven is conceived as consisting of "snares," which is a strangely incongruous idea. Such mingled metaphors are less distasteful to Hebrew poets than to Western critics; and the various expedients to smooth this one away, such as altering the text and neglecting the accents and reading "coals of fire," are unnecessary sacrifices to correctness of style. Delitzsch thinks that the "snares" are "a whole discharge of lassoes," *i.e.* lightnings, the zigzag course of which may be compared to a "noose thrown down from above"! The purpose of the snares is to hold fast the victims so that they cannot escape the fiery rain —a terrible picture, the very incongruity of figure heightening the grim effect. The division of the verse according to the accents parts the snares from the actual components of the fatal shower, and makes the second half of the verse an independent clause, which is probably to be taken, like the former clause, as a wish: "Fire and brimstone and a burning wind [Zornhauch, Hupfeld] be the portion of their cup," again an incongruity making the representation more dreadful. What a draught—flaming brimstone and a hot blast as of the simoom! The tremendous metaphor suggests awful reality.

But the double judgment of ver. 5 has a gentler side, and the reason for the tempest of wrath is likewise that for the blessed hope of the upright, as the "for" of

ver. 7 teaches. "Jehovah is righteous." That is the rock foundation for the indomitable faith of the Psalter in the certain ultimate triumph of patient, afflicted righteousness. Because God in His own character is so, He must love righteous acts—His own and men's. The latter seems to be the meaning here, where the fate of men is the subject in hand. The Divine "love" is here contrasted with both the wicked man's "love" of "violence" and God's "hate" (ver. 5), and is the foundation of the final confidence, "The upright shall behold His face." The converse rendering, "His countenance doth behold the upright" (A.V.), is grammatically permissible, but would be flat, tautological—since ver. 4 has already said so—and inappropriate to the close, where a statement as to the upright, antithetical to that as to the wicked, is needed. God looks on the upright, as has been said; and the upright shall gaze on Him, here and now in the communion of that faith which is a better kind of sight and hereafter in the vision of heaven, which the psalmist was on the verge of anticipating. That mutual gaze is blessedness. They who, looking up, behold Jehovah are brave to front all foes and to keep calm hearts in the midst of alarms. Hope burns like a pillar of fire in them when it is gone out in others; and to all the suggestions of their own timidity or of others they have the answer, "In the Lord have I put my trust; how say ye to my soul, Flee?" "Here I stand; I can do no otherwise. God help me. Amen."

PSALM XII.

1 **Save, Jehovah, for the godly ceases,**
For the trusty have vanished from the sons of men.
2 **They speak vanity every man with his neighbour;**
[With] smooth lip and a heart and a heart do they speak.

3 **May Jehovah cut off all smooth lips,**
The tongue that speaks proud things,
4 **That says, To our tongues we give strength: our lips are our own (lit. with us);**
Who is lord to us?

5 **For the oppression of the afflicted, for the sighing of the needy,**
Now I will arise, saith Jehovah; I will set him in the safety he pants for.
6 **The words of Jehovah are pure words,**
Silver tried in a furnace [and flowing down] to the ground, purified seven times.

7 **Thou, Jehovah, shalt guard them;**
Thou shalt preserve him from this generation for ever.
8 **All around the wicked swagger,**
When vileness is set on high among the sons of men.

ONE penalty of living near God is keen pain from low lives. The ears that hear God's word cannot but be stunned and hurt by the babble of empty speech. This psalm is profoundly melancholy, but without trace of personal affliction. The psalmist is not sad for himself, but sick of the clatter of godless tongues, in which he discerns the outcome of godless lives. His plaint wakes echoes in hearts touched by the love of God and the visions of man's true life. It

passes through four clearly marked stages, each consisting of two verses: despondent contemplation of the flood of corrupt talk which seems to submerge all (1, 2); a passionate prayer for Divine intervention, wrung from the psalmist by the miserable spectacle (3, 4); the answer to that cry from the voice of God, with the rapturous response of the psalmist to it (5, 6); and the confidence built on the Divine word, which rectifies the too despondent complaint at the beginning, but is still shaded by the facts which stare him in the face (7, 8).

The cry for help (*Save*, LXX.) abruptly beginning the psalm tells of the sharp pain from which it comes. The psalmist has been brooding over the black outlook till his overcharged heart relieves itself in this single-worded prayer. As he looks round he sees no exceptions to the prevailing evil. Like Elijah, he thinks that he is left alone, and love to God and men and reliableness and truth are vanished with their representatives. No doubt in all such despondent thoughts about the rarity of Christian charity and of transparent truthfulness there is an element of exaggeration, which in the present case is, as we shall see, corrected by the process of God-taught meditation. But the clearer the insight into what society should be, the sadder the estimate of what it is. Roseate pictures of it augur ill for the ideal which their painters have. It is better to be too sensitive to evils than to be contented with them. Unless the passionate conviction of the psalmist has burned itself into us, we shall but languidly work to set things right. Heroes and reformers have all begun with "exaggerated estimates" of corruption. The judgment formed of the moral state of this or of any generation depends on the

clearness with which we grasp as a standard the ideal realised in Jesus Christ and on the closeness of our communion with God.

As in Psalm v., sins of speech are singled out, and of these "vanity" and "smooth lips with a heart and a heart" are taken as typical. As in Eph. iv. 25, the guilt of falsehood is deduced from the bond of neighbourliness, which it rends. The sin, to which a "high civilisation" is especially prone, of saying pleasant things without meaning them, seems to this moralist as grave as to most men it seems slight. Is the psalmist right or wrong in taking speech for an even more clear index of corruption than deeds? What would he have said if he had been among us, when the press has augmented the power of the tongue, and floods of "vanity," not only in the form of actual lies, but of inane trivialities and nothings of personal gossip, are poured over the whole nation? Surely, if his canon is right, there is something rotten in the state of this land; and the Babel around may well make good men sad and wise men despondent.

Shall we venture to follow the psalmist in the second turn of his thoughts (vv. 3, 4), where the verb at the beginning is best taken as an optative and rendered, "May Jehovah cut off"? The deepest meaning of his desire every true man will take for his own, namely the cessation of the sin; but the more we live in the spirit of Jesus, the more we shall cherish the hope that that may be accomplished by winning the sinner. Better to have the tongue touched with a live coal from the altar than cut out. In the one case there is only a mute, in the other an instrument for God's praise. But the impatience of evil and the certainty that God can subdue it, which make the very nerve of

the prayer, should belong to Christians yet more than to the psalmist. A new phase of sinful speech appears as provoking judgment even more than the former did. The combination of flattery and boastfulness is not rare, discordant as they seem; but the special description of the "proud things" spoken is that they are denials of responsibility to God or man for the use of lips and tongue. Insolence has gone far when it has formulated itself into definite statements. Twenty men will act on the principle for one who will put it into words. The conscious adoption and cynical avowal of it are a mark of defiance of God. "To our tongues we give strength"—an obscure expression which may be taken in various shades of meaning, *e.g.* as = We have power over, or = Through, or as to, our tongues we are strong, or = We will give effect to our words. Possibly it stands as the foundation of the daring defiance in the last clause of the verse, and asserts that the speaker is the author of his power of speech and therefore responsible to none for its use. "Our lips are with us" may be a further development of the same godless thought. "With us" is usually taken to mean "our allies," or confederates, but signifies rather "in our possession, to do as we will with them." "Who is lord over us?" There speaks godless insolence shaking off dependence, and asserting shamelessly licence of speech and life, unhindered by obligations to God and His law.

With dramatic swiftness the scene changes in the next pair of verses (5, 6). That deep voice, which silences all the loud bluster, as the lion's roar hushes the midnight cries of lesser creatures, speaks in the waiting soul of the psalmist. Like Hezekiah with Sennacherib's letter, he spreads before the Lord the "words with which they reproach Thee," and, like

Hezekiah, he has immediate answer. The inward assurance that God will arise is won by prayer at once, and changes the whole aspect of the facts which as yet remain unchanged. The situation does not seem so desperate when we know that God is moving. Whatever delay may intervene before the actual Divine act, there is none before the assurance of it calms the soul. Many wintry days may have to be faced, but a breath of spring has been in the air, and hope revives. The twofold reason which rouses the Divine activity is very strikingly put first in ver. 5. Not merely the "oppression or spoiling of the meek," but that conjoined with the "sighing of the needy," bring God into the field. Not affliction alone, but affliction which impels to prayer, moves Him to "stir up His strength." "Now will I arise." That solemn "now" marks the crisis, or turning-point, when long forbearance ends and the crash of retribution begins. It is like the whirr of the clock that precedes the striking. The swiftly following blow will ring out the old evil. The purpose of God's intervention is the safety of the afflicted who have sighed to Him; but while that is clear, the condensed language of ver. 5 is extremely obscure. The A.V.'s rendering, "I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him," requires a too liberal use of supplemental words to eke out the sense; and the rendering of the R.V. (margin), "the safety he panteth for," is most congruous with the run of the sentence and of the thought. What has just been described as a sigh is now, with equal naturalness, figured as a pant of eager desire. The former is the expression of the weight of the affliction, the latter of yearning to escape from it. The latter is vain waste of breath unless accompanied with the former, which is

also a prayer; but if so accompanied, the desire of the humble soul is the prophecy of its own fulfilment: and the measure of the Divine deliverance is regulated by His servant's longing. He will always, sooner or later, get "the safety for which he pants." Faith determines the extent of God's gift.

The listening psalmist rapturously responds in ver. 6 to God's great word. That word stands, with strong force of contrast, side by side with the arrogant chatter of irresponsible frivolity, and sounds majestic by the side of the shrill feebleness of the defiance. Now the psalmist lifts his voice in trustful acceptance of the oracle.

The general sense of ver. 6 is clear, and the metaphor which compares God's words to refined silver is familiar, but the precise meaning of the words rendered "in a furnace on the earth" (R.V.) is doubtful. The word for "furnace" occurs only here, and has consequently been explained in very different ways, is omitted altogether by the LXX., and supposed by Cheyne to be a remnant of an ancient gloss. But the meaning of furnace or crucible is fairly made out and appropriate. But what does "tried in a furnace to the earth" mean? The "on the earth" of the R.V. is scarcely in accordance with the use of the preposition "to," and the best course is to adopt a supplement and read "tried in a furnace [and running down] to the earth." The sparkling stream of molten silver as, free from dross, it runs from the melting-pot to the mould on the ground, is a beautiful figure of the word of God, clear of all the impurities of men's words, which the psalm has been bewailing and raining down on the world. God's words are a silver shower, precious and bright.

The last turn of the psalm builds hope on the pure words just heard from heaven. When God speaks a promise, faith repeats it as a certitude and prophesies in the line of the revelation. "Thou shalt" is man's answer to God's "I will." In the strength of the Divine word, the despondency of the opening strain is brightened. The godly and faithful shall not "cease from among the children of men," since God will keep them; and His keeping shall preserve them. "This generation" describes a class rather than an epoch. It means the vain talkers who have been sketched in such dark colours in the earlier part of the psalm. These are "the children of men" among whom the meek and needy are to live, not failing before them because God holds them up. This hope is for the militant Church, whose lot is to stand for God amidst wide-flowing evil, which may swell and rage against the band of faithful ones, but cannot sweep them away. Not of victory which annihilates opposition, but of charmed lives invulnerable in conflict, is the psalmist's confidence. There is no more lamenting of the extinction of good men and their goodness, neither is there triumphant anticipation of present extinction of bad men and their badness, but both are to grow together till the harvest.

But even the pure words which promise safety and wake the response of faith do not wholly scatter the clouds. The psalm recurs very pathetically at its close to the tone of its beginning. Notice the repetition of "the children of men" which links ver. 8 with ver. 1. If the fear that the faithful should fail is soothed by God's promise heard by the psalmist sounding in his soul, the hard fact of dominant evil is not altered thereby. That "vileness is set on high among the sons of men" is the description of a world turned upside down.

Beggars are on horseback, and princes walking. The despicable is honoured, and corruption is a recommendation to high position. There have been such epochs of moral dissolution; and there is always a drift in that direction, which is only checked by the influence of the "faithful." If "vileness is set on high among the sons of men," it is because the sons of men prefer it to the stern purity of goodness. A corrupt people will crown corrupt men and put them aloft. The average goodness of the community is generally fairly represented by its heroes, rulers, and persons to whom influence is given; and when such topsy-turvydom as the rule of the worst is in fashion, "the wicked walk on every side." Impunity breeds arrogance; and they swagger and swell, knowing that they are protected. Impunity multiplies the number; and on every side they swarm, like vermin in a dirty house. But even when such an outlook saddens, the soul that has been in the secret place of the Most High and has heard the words of His mouth will not fall into pessimistic despondency, nor think that the faithful fail, because the wicked strut. When tempted to wail, "I, even I only, am left," such a soul will listen to the still small voice that tells of seven thousands of God's hidden ones, and will be of good cheer, as knowing that God's men can never cease so long as God continues.

PSALM XIII.

1 **For how long, Jehovah, wilt Thou forget me for ever?**
For how long wilt Thou hide Thy face from me?
2 **For how long shall I brood on schemes (*i.e.*, of deliverance) in my soul,**
Trouble in my heart by day?
For how long shall my foe lift himself above me?
3 **Look hither, answer me, Jehovah, my God;**
Lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the death,
4 **Lest my foe say, I have overcome him,**
And oppressors exult when I am moved.
5 **But as for me, in Thy mercy have I trusted;**
Let my heart exult in Thy salvation:
6 **I will sing to Jehovah, for He has dealt bountifully with me.**

THIS little psalm begins in agitation, and ends in calm. The waves run high at first, but swiftly sink to rest, and at last lie peacefully glinting in sunshine. It falls into three strophes, of which the first (vv. 1, 2) is the complaint of endurance strained almost to giving way; the second (vv. 3, 4) is prayer which feeds fainting faith; and the third (vv. 5, 6, which are one in the Hebrew) is the voice of confidence, which, in the midst of trouble, makes future deliverance and praise a present experience.

However true it is that sorrow is "but for a moment," it seems to last for an eternity. Sad hours are leaden-footed, and joyful ones winged. If sorrows passed to our consciousness as quickly as joys, or joys lingered as long as sorrows, life would be less weary. That

reiterated "How long?" betrays how weary it was to the psalmist. Very significant is the progress of thought in the fourfold questioning plaint, which turns first to God, then to himself, then to the enemy. The root of his sorrow is that God seems to have forgotten him; therefore his soul is full of plans for relief, and the enemy seems to be lifted above him. The "sorrow of the world" begins with the visible evil, and stops with the inward pain; the sorrow which betakes itself first to God, and thinks last of the foe, has trust embedded in its depths, and may unblamed use words which sound like impatience. If the psalmist had not held fast by his confidence, he would not have appealed to God. So the "illogical" combination in his first cry of "How long?" and "for ever" is not to be smoothed away, but represents vividly, because unconsciously, the conflict in his soul from the mingling of the assurance that God's seeming forgetfulness must have an end and the dread that it might have none. Luther, who had trodden the dark places, understood the meaning of the cry, and puts it beautifully when he says that here "hope itself despairs, and despair yet hopes, and only that unspeakable groaning is audible with which the Holy Spirit, who moves over the waters covered with darkness, intercedes for us." The psalmist is tempted to forget the confidence expressed in Psalm ix. 18 and to sink to the denial animating the wicked in Psalms x., xi. The heart wrung by troubles finds little consolation in the mere intellectual belief in a Divine omniscience. An idle remembrance which does not lead to actual help is a poor stay for such a time. No doubt the psalmist knew that forgetfulness was impossible to God; but a God who, though He remembered, did nothing for, His servant, was not enough for

him, nor is He for any of us. Heart and flesh cry out for *active* remembrance; and, however clear the creed, the tendency of long-continued misery will be to tempt to the feeling that the sufferer is forgotten. It takes much grace to cling fast to the belief that He thinks of the poor suppliant whose cry for deliverance is unanswered. The natural inference is one or other of the psalmist's two here: God has forgotten or has hidden His face in indifference or displeasure. The Evangelist's profound "therefore" is the corrective of the psalmist's temptation: "Jesus loved" the three sad ones at Bethany; "when therefore He heard that he was sick, He abode still two days in the place where He was."

Left alone, without God's help, what can a man do but think and think, plan and scheme to weariness all night and carry a heavy heart as he sees by daylight how futile his plans are? Probably "by night" should be supplied in ver. 2 *a*; and the picture of the gnawing cares and busy thoughts which banish sleep and of the fresh burst of sorrow on each new morning appeals only too well to all sad souls. A brother laments across the centuries, and his long-silent wail is as the voice of our own griefs. The immediate visible occasion of trouble appears only in the last of the fourfold cries. God's apparent forgetfulness and the psalmist's own subjective agitations are more prominent than the "enemy" who "lifts himself above him." His arrogant airs and oppression would soon vanish if God would arise. The insight which places him last in order is taught by faith. The soul stands between God and the external world, with all its possible calamities; and if the relation with God is right, and help is flowing unbrokenly from Him, the relation to the world will quickly come right,

and the soul be lifted high above the foe, however lofty he be or think himself.

The agitation of the first strophe is somewhat stilled in the second, in which the stream of prayer runs clear without such foam, as the impatient questions of the first part. It falls into four clauses, which have an approximate correspondence to those of strophe 1. "Look hither, answer me, Jehovah, my God." The first petition corresponds to the hiding of God's face, and perhaps the second, by the law of inverted parallelism, may correspond to the *forgetting*, but in any case the noticeable thing is the swift decisiveness of spring with which the psalmist's faith reaches firm ground here. Mark the implied belief that God's look is not an otiose gaze, but brings immediate act answering the prayer; mark the absence of copula between the verbs, giving force to the prayer and swiftness to the sequence of Divine acts; mark the outgoing of the psalmist's faith in the addition to the name "Jehovah" (as in ver. 1), of the personal "my God," with all the sweet and reverent appeal hived in the address. The third petition, "Lighten mine eyes," is not for illumination of vision, but for renewed strength. Dying eyes are glazed; a sick man's are heavy and dull. Returning health brightens them. So here the figure of sickness threatening to become death stands for trouble, or possibly the "enemy" is a real foe seeking the life, as will be the most natural interpretation if the Davidic origin is maintained. To "sleep death" is a forcible compressed expression, which is only attenuated by being completed. The prayer rests upon the profound conviction that Jehovah is the fountain of life, and that only by His continual pouring of fresh vitality into a man can any eyes be kept from death. The brightest must be

replenished from His hand, or they fail and become dim; the dimmest can be brightened by His gift of vigorous health. As in the first strophe the psalmist passed from God to self, and thence to enemies, so he does in the second. His prayer addresses God; its pleas regard, first, himself, and, second, his foe. How is the preventing of the enemy's triumph in his being stronger than the psalmist and of his malicious joy over the latter's misfortune an argument with God to help? It is the plea, so familiar in the Psalter and to devout hearts, that God's honour is identified with His servant's deliverance, a true thought, and one that may reverently be entertained by the humblest lover of God, but which needs to be carefully guarded. We must make very sure that God's cause is ours before we can be sure that ours is His; we must be very completely living for His honour before we dare assume that His honour is involved in our continuing to live. As Calvin says, "Cum eo nobis communis erit hæc precatio, si sub Dei imperio et auspiciis militamus."

The storm has all rolled away in the third strophe, in which faith has triumphed over doubt and anticipates the fulfilment of its prayer. It begins with an emphatic opposition of the psalmist's personality to the foe: "But as for me"—however they may rage—"I have trusted in Thy mercy." Because he has thus trusted, therefore he is sure that that mercy will work for him salvation or deliverance from his present peril. Anything is possible rather than that the appeal of faith to God's heart of love should not be answered. Whoever can say, I have trusted, has the right to say, I shall rejoice. It was but a moment ago that this man had asked, How long shall I have sorrow in my heart? and now the sad heart is flooded with sudden gladness.

Such is the magic of faith, which can see an unrisen light in the thickest darkness, and hear the birds singing amongst the branches even while the trees are bare and the air silent. How significant the contrast of the two rejoicings set side by side: the adversaries' when the good man is "moved"; the good man's when God's salvation establishes him in his place! The closing strain reaches forward to deliverance not yet accomplished, and, by the prerogative of trust, calls things that are not as though they were. "He has dealt bountifully with me"; so says the psalmist who had begun with "How long?" No external change has taken place; but his complaint and prayer have helped him to tighten his grasp of God, and have transported him into the certain future of deliverance and praise. He who can thus say, "I will sing," when the hoped-for mercy has wrought salvation, is not far off singing even while it tarries. The sure anticipation of triumph is triumph. The sad minor of "How long?" if coming from faithful lips, passes into a jubilant key, which heralds the full gladness of the yet future songs of deliverance.

PSALM XIV.

1 The fool says in his heart, There is no God;
They corrupt; they make abominable their doings;
There is no one doing good.

2 Jehovah looketh down from heaven upon the sons of men
To see if there is any having discernment,
Seeking after God.

3 They are all turned aside: together they are become putrid;
There is no one doing good,
There is not even one.

4 Do they not know, all the workers of iniquity,
Who devour my people [as] they devour bread?
On Jehovah they do not call.

5 There they feared a [great] fear,
For God is in the righteous generation.

6 The counsel of the afflicted ye would put to shame,
For God is his refuge.

7 Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion!
When Jehovah brings back the captivity of His people,
May Jacob exult, may Israel be glad!

THIS psalm springs from the same situation as Psalms x. and xii. It has several points of likeness to both. It resembles the former in its attribution to "the fool" of the heart-speech, "There is no God," and the latter in its use of the phrases "sons of men" and "generation" as ethical terms and in its thought of a Divine interference as the source of safety for the righteous. We have thus three psalms closely connected, but separated from each other by Psalms xi. and xiii.

Now it is observable that these three have no personal references, and that the two which part them have. It would appear that the five are arranged on the principle of alternating a general complaint of the evil of the times with a more personal pleading of an individual sufferer. It is also noticeable that these five psalms—a little group of wailing and sighs—are marked off from the cognate psalms iii.–vii. and xvi., xvii., by two (Psalms viii. and xv.) in an entirely different tone. A second recast of this psalm appears in the Elohistic Book (Psalm liii.), the characteristics of which will be dealt with there. This is probably the original.

The structure of the psalm is simple, but is not carried out completely. It should consist of seven verses each having three clauses, and so having stamped on it the sacred numbers 3 and 7, but vv. 5 and 6 each want a clause, and are the more vehement from their brevity.

The heavy fact of wide-spread corruption presses on the psalmist, and starts a train of thought which begins with a sad picture of the deluge of evil, rises to a vision of God's judgment of and on it, triumphs in the prospect of the sudden panic which shall shake the souls of the "workers of iniquity" when they see that God is with the righteous, and ends with a sigh for the coming of that time. The staple of the poem is but the familiar contrast of a corrupt world and a righteous God who judges, but it is cast into very dramatic and vivid form here.

We listen first (ver. 1) to the psalmist's judgment of his generation. Probably it was very unlike the rosy hues in which a heart less in contact with God and the unseen would have painted the condition of things. Eras of great culture and material prosperity may have

a very seamy side, which eyes accustomed to the light of God cannot fail to see. The root of the evil lay, as the psalmist believed, in a practical denial of God; and whoever thus denied Him was "a fool." It does not need formulated atheism in order to say in one's heart, "There is no God." Practical denial or neglect of His working in the world, rather than a creed of negation, is in the psalmist's mind. In effect, we say that there is no God when we shut Him up in a far-off heaven, and never think of Him as concerned in our affairs. To strip Him of His justice and rob Him of His control is the part of a fool. For the Biblical conception of folly is moral perversity rather than intellectual feebleness, and whoever is morally and religiously wrong cannot be in reality intellectually right.

The practical denial of God lies at the root of two forms of evil. Positively, "they have made their doings corrupt and abominable"—rotten in themselves and sickening and loathsome to pure hearts and to God. Negatively, they do no good things. That is the dreary estimate of his cotemporaries forced on this sad-hearted singer, because he himself had so thrillingly felt God's touch and had therefore been smitten with loathing of men's low ways and with a passion for goodness. "Sursum corda" is the only consolation for such hearts.

So the next wave of thought (ver. 2) brings into his consciousness the solemn contrast between the godless noise and activity of earth and the silent gaze of God, that marks it all. The strong anthropomorphism of the vivid picture recalls the stories of the Deluge, of Babel, and of Sodom, and casts an emotional hue over the abstract thought of the Divine omniscience and observance The purpose of the Divine quest is set

forth with deep insight, as being the finding of even one good, devout man. It is the anticipation of Christ's tender word to the Samaritan that "the Father seeketh such to worship Him." God's heart yearns to find hearts that turn to Him; He seeks those who seek Him; they who seek Him, and only they, are "wise." Other Scriptures present other reasons for that gaze of God from heaven, but this one in the midst of its solemnity is gracious with revelation of Divine desires.

What is to be the issue of the strongly contrasted situation in these two verses: beneath, a world full of godless lawlessness; above, a fixed eye piercing to the discernment of the inmost nature of actions and characters? Ver. 3 answers. We may almost venture to say that it shows a disappointed God, so sharply does it put the difference between what He desired to see and what He did see. The psalmist's sad estimate is repeated as the result of the Divine search. But it is also increased in emphasis and in compass. For "the whole" (race) is the subject. Universality is insisted on in each clause; "all," "together," "not one," and strong metaphors are used to describe the condition of humanity. It is "turned aside," *i.e.*, from the way of Jehovah; it is become putrid, like a rotting carcase, is rank, and smells to heaven. There is a sad cadence in that "no, not one," as of a hope long cherished and reluctantly abandoned, not without some tinge of wonder at the barren results of such a search. This stern indictment is quoted by St. Paul in Romans as confirmation of his thesis of universal sinfulness; and, however the psalmist had the wickedness of Israel in the foreground of his consciousness, his language is studiously wide and meant to include all "the sons of men."

But this baffled quest cannot be the end. If Jehovah seeks in vain for goodness on earth, earth cannot go on for ever in godless riot. Therefore, with eloquent abruptness, the voice from heaven crashes in upon the "fools" in the full career of their folly. The thunder rolls from a clear sky. God speaks in ver. 4. The three clauses of the Divine rebuke roughly correspond with those of ver. 1 in so far as the first points to ignorance as the root of wrong-doing, the second charges positive sin, and the third refers to negative evil. "Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge?" The question has almost a tone of surprise, as if even Omniscience found matter of wonder in men's mysterious love of evil. Jesus "marvelled" at some men's "unbelief"; and certainly sin is the most inexplicable thing in the world, and might almost astonish God as well as heaven and earth. The meaning of the word "know" here is best learned from ver. 1. "Not to know" is the same thing as to be "a fool." That ignorance, which is moral perversity as well as intellectual blindness, needs not to have a special object stated. Its thick veil hides all real knowledge of God, duty, and consequences from men. It makes evil-doing possible. If the evil-doer could have flashed before him the realities of things, his hand would stay its crime. It is not true that all sin can be resolved into ignorance, but it is true that criminal ignorance is necessary to make sin possible. A bull shuts its eyes when it charges. Men who do wrong are blind in one eye at least, for, if they saw at the moment what they probably know well enough, sin would be impossible.

This explanation of the words seems more congruous with ver. 1 than that of others, "made to know," *i.e.* by experience to rue.

Ver. 4 *b* is obscure from its compressed brevity: "Eating my people, they eat bread." The A.V. and R.V. take their introduction of the "as" of comparison from the old translations. The Hebrew has no term of comparison, but it is not unusual to omit the formal term in rapid and emotional speech, and the picture of the appetite with which a hungry man devours his food may well stand for the relish with which the oppressors swallowed up the innocent. There seems no need for the ingenuities which have been applied to the interpretation of the clause, nor for departing, with Cheyne, from the division of the verse according to the accents. The positive sins of the oppressors, of which we have heard so much in the connected psalms, are here concentrated in their cruel plundering of "my people," by which the whole strain of the psalm leads us to understand the devout kernel of Israel, in contrast with the mass of "men of the earth" in the nation, and not the nation as a whole in contrast with heathen enemies.

The Divine indictment is completed by "They call not on Jehovah." Practical atheism is, of course, prayerless. That negation makes a dreary silence in the noisiest life, and is in one aspect the crown, and in another the foundation, of all evil-doing.

The thunder-peal of the Divine voice strikes a sudden panic into the hosts of evil. "There they feared a fear." The psalmist conceives the scene and its locality. He does not say "there" when he means "then," but he pictures the terror seizing the oppressors where they stood when the Divine thunder rolled above their heads; and with him, as with us, "on the spot" implies "at the moment." The epoch of such panic is left vague. Whensoever in any man's experi-

ence that solemn voice sounds, conscience wakes fear. The revelation by any means of a God who sees evil and judges it makes cowards of us all. Probably the psalmist thought of some speedily impending act of judgment; but his juxtaposition of the two facts, the audible voice of God and the swift terror that shakes the heart, contains an eternal truth, which men who whisper in their hearts, "There is no God," need to ponder.

This verse 5 is the first of the two shorter verses of our psalm, containing only two clauses instead of the regular three; but it does not therefore follow that anything has dropped out. Rather the framework is sufficiently elastic to allow of such variation according to the contents, and the shorter verse is not without a certain increase of vigour, derived from the sharp opposition of its two clauses. On the one hand is the terror of the sinner occasioned by and contrasted with the discovery which stands on the other that God is in the righteous generation. The psalmist sets before himself and us the two camps: the panic-stricken and confused mass of enemies ready to break into flight and the little flock of the "righteous generation," at peace in the midst of trouble and foes because God is in the midst of them. No added clause could heighten the effect of that contrast, which is like that of the host of Israel walking in light and safety on one side of the fiery pillar and the army of Pharaoh groping in darkness and dread on the other. The permanent relations of God to the two sorts of men who are found in every generation and community are set forth in that strongly marked contrast.

In ver. 6 the psalmist himself addresses the oppressors, with triumphant confidence born of his

previous contemplations. The first clause might be a question, but is more probably a taunting affirmation: "You would frustrate the plans of the afflicted"—and you could not—"for Jehovah is his refuge." Here again the briefer sentence brings out the eloquent contrast. The malicious foe, seeking to thwart the poor man's plans, is thwarted. His desire is unaccomplished; and there is but one explanation of the impotence of the mighty and the powerfulness of the weak, namely that Jehovah is the stronghold of His saints. Not by reason of his own wit or power does the afflicted baffle the oppressor, but by reason of the strength and inaccessibleness of his hiding-place. "The conies are a feeble folk, but they make their houses in the rocks," where nothing that has not wings can get at them.

So, finally, the whole course of thought gathers itself up in the prayer that the salvation of Israel—the true Israel apparently—were come out of Zion, God's dwelling, from which He comes forth in His delivering power. The salvation longed for is that just described. The voice of the oppressed handful of good men in an evil generation is heard in this closing prayer. It is encouraged by the visions which have passed before the psalmist. The assurance that God will intervene is the very life-breath of the cry to Him that He would. Because we know that He will deliver, therefore we find it in our hearts to pray that He would deliver. The revelation of His gracious purposes animates the longings for their realisation. Such a sigh of desire has no sadness in its longing and no doubt in its expectation. It basks in the light of an unrisen sun, and feels beforehand the gladness of the future joys "when the Lord shall bring again the captivity of His people."

This last verse is by some regarded as a liturgical addition to the psalm; but ver. 6 cannot be the original close, and it is scarcely probable that some other ending has been put aside to make room for this. Besides, the prayer of ver. 7 coheres very naturally with the rest of the psalm, if only we take that phrase "turns the captivity" in the sense which it admittedly bears in Job xlii. 10 and Ezek. xvi. 53, namely that of deliverance from misfortune. Thus almost all modern interpreters understand the words, and even those who most strongly hold the late date of the psalm do not find here any reference to the historical bondage. The devout kernel of the nation is suffering from oppressors, and that may well be called a captivity. For a good man the present condition of society is bondage, as many a devout soul has felt since the psalmist did. But there is a dawning hope of a better day of freedom, the liberty of the glory of the children of God; and the gladness of the ransomed captives may be in some degree anticipated even now. The psalmist was thinking only of some intervention on the field of history, and we are not to read loftier hopes into his song. But it is as impossible for Christians not to entertain, as it was for him to grasp firmly, the last, mightiest hope of a last, utter deliverance from all evil and of an eternal and perfect joy.

PSALM XV.

1 Jehovah, who can be guest in Thy tent?
Who can dwell in Thy holy hill?

2 The man walking blamelessly, and doing righteousness,
And speaking truth with his heart.

3 He has not slander on his tongue,
He does not harm to his comrade,
And reproach he does not lay on his neighbour.

4 A reprobate is despised in his eyes,
But the fearers of Jehovah he honours;
He swears to his own hurt, and will not change.

5 His silver he does not give at usury,
And a bribe against the innocent he does not take;
He that does these things shall not be moved for ever.

THE ideal worshipper of Jehovah is painted in this psalm in a few broad outlines. Zion is holy because God's "tent" is there. This is the only hint of date given by the psalm; and all that can be said is that, if that consecration of Thy hill was recent, the poet would naturally ponder all the more deeply the question of who were fit to dwell in the new solemnities of the abode of Jehovah. The tone of the psalm, then, accords with the circumstances of the time when David brought the ark to Jerusalem; but more than this cannot be affirmed. Much more important are its two main points: the conception of the guests of Jehovah and the statement of the ethical qualifications of these.

As to structure, the psalm is simple. It has, first,

the general question and answer in two verses of two clauses each (vv. 1, 2). Then the general description of the guest of God is expanded in three verses of three clauses each, the last of which closes with an assurance of stability, which varies and heightens the idea of dwelling in the tent of Jehovah.

It is no mere poetic apostrophe with which the psalmist's question is prefaced. He does thereby consult the Master of the house as to the terms on which He extends hospitality, which terms it is His right to prescribe. He brings to his own view and to his readers' all that lies in the name of Jehovah, the covenant name, and all that is meant by "holiness," and thence draws the answer to his question, which is none the less Jehovah's answer because it springs in the psalmist's heart and is spoken by his lips. The character of the God determines the character of the worshipper. The roots of ethics are in religion. Th Old Testament ideal of the righteous man flows fror its revelation of the righteous God. Not men's own fancies, but insight gained by communion with God and docile inquiry of Him, will reliably tell what manner of men they are who can abide in His light.

The thought, expressed so forcibly in the question of the psalm, that men may be God's guests, is a very deep and tender one, common to a considerable number of psalms (v. 5, xxvii. 4, lxxxiv. 5, etc.). The word translated "abide" in the A.V. and "sojourn" in the R.V. originally implied a transient residence as a stranger, but when applied to men's relations to God, it does not always preserve the idea of transiency (see, for instance, lxi. 4: "I will dwell in Thy tent *for ever*"); and the idea of protection is the most prominent. The stranger who took refuge in the tent even of the wild Beduin

was safe, much more the happy man who crept under the folds of the tent of Jehovah. If the holy hill of Zion were not immediately mentioned, one might be tempted to think that the tent here was only used as a metaphor; but the juxtaposition of the two things seems to set the allusion to the dwelling-place of the Ark on its hill beyond question. In the gracious hospitality of the antique world, a guest was sheltered from all harm; his person was inviolable, his wants all met. So the guest of Jehovah is safe, can claim asylum from every foe and a share in all the bountiful provision of His abode. Taken accurately, the two verbs in ver. 1 differ in that the first implies transient and the second permanent abode; but that difference is not in the psalmist's mind, and the two phrases mean the same thing, with only the difference that the former brings out his conception of the rights of the guest. Clearly, then, the psalmist's question by no means refers only to an outward approach to an outward tabernacle; but we see here the symbol in the very act of melting into the deep spiritual reality signified. The singer has been educated by the husks of ritual to pass beyond these, and has learned that there is a better dwelling-place for Jehovah, and therefore for himself, than that pitched on Zion and frequented by impure and pure alike.

Ver. 2 sums the qualifications of Jehovah's guest in one comprehensive demand, that he should walk uprightly, and then analyses that requirement into the two of righteous deeds and truthful speech. The verbs are in the participial form, which emphasises the notion of habitual action. The general answer is expanded in the three following verses, which each contain three clauses, and take up the two points of ver. 2 in inverted

order, although perhaps not with absolute accuracy of arrangement. The participial construction is in them changed for finite verbs. Ver. 2 sketches the figure in outline, and the rest of the psalm adds clause on clause of description as if the man stood before the psalmist's vision. Habits are described as acts.

The first outstanding characteristic of this ideal is that it deals entirely with duties to men, and the second is that it is almost wholly negative. Moral qualities of the most obvious kind, and such as can be tested in daily life and are cultivated by rigid abstinence from prevailing evils, and not any recondite and impalpable refinements of conduct, still less any peculiar emotions of souls raised high above the dusty levels of common life, are the qualifications for dwelling, a guarded guest, in that great pavilion. Such a stress laid on homely duties, which the universal conscience recognises, is characteristic of the ethics of the Old Testament as a whole and of the Psalter in particular, and is exemplified in the lives of its saints and heroes. They "come eating and drinking," sharing in domestic joys and civic duties; and however high their aspirations and vows may soar, they have always their feet firmly planted on the ground and, laying the smallest duties on themselves, "tread life's common road in cheerful godliness." The Christian answer to the psalmist's question goes deeper than his, but is fatally incomplete unless it include his and lay the same stress on duties to men which all acknowledge, as that does. Lofty emotions, raptures of communion, aspirations which bring their own fulfilment, and all the experiences of the devout soul, which are sometimes apt to be divorced from plain morality, need the ballast of the psalmist's homely answer to the great question. There is something in a religion of emotion

not wholly favourable to the practice of ordinary duties; and many men, good after a fashion, seem to have their spiritual nature divided into water-tight and uncommunicating compartments, in one of which they keep their religion, and in the other their morality.

The stringent assertion that these two are inseparable was the great peculiarity of Judaism as compared with the old world religions, from which, as from the heathenism of to-day, the conception that religion had anything to do with conduct was absent. But it is not only heathenism that needs the reminder.

True, the ideal drawn here is not the full Christian one. It is too merely negative for that, and too entirely concerned with acts. Therein it reproduces the limitations of the earlier revelation. It scarcely touches at all the deeper forms of "love to our neighbour"; and, above all, it has no answer to the question which instinctively rises in the heart when the psalm has answered its own question. How can I attain to these qualifications? is a second interrogation, raised by the response to the first, and for its answer we have to turn to Jesus. The psalm, like the law which inspired it, is mainly negative, deals mainly with acts, and has no light to show how its requirements may be won. But it yet stands as an unantiquated statement of what a man must be who dwells in the secret place of the Most High. How he may become such a one we must learn from Him who both teaches us the way, and gives us the power, to become such as God will shelter in the safe recesses of His pavilion.

The details of the qualifications as described in the psalm are simple and homely. They relate first to right speech, which holds so prominent a place in the ethics of the Psalter. The triplets of ver. 3 probably

all refer to sins of the tongue. The good man has no slander on his tongue; he does not harm his companion (by word) nor heap reproach on his neighbour. These things are the staple of much common talk. What a quantity of brilliant wit and polished sarcasm would perish if this rule were observed! How dull many sparkling circles would become, and how many columns of newspapers and pages of books would be obliterated, if the censor's pencil struck out all that infringed it! Ver. 4 adds as characteristic of a righteous man that in his estimate of character he gives each his own, and judges men by no other standard than their moral worth. The reprobate may be a millionaire or a prince, but his due is contempt; the devout man may be a pauper or one of narrow culture, but his due is respect, and he gets it. "A terrible sagacity informs" the good man's heart; and he who is, in his own inmost desires, walking uprightly will not be seduced into adulation of a popular idol who is a bad man, nor turned from reverence for lowly goodness. The world will be a paradise when the churl is no more called bountiful.

Apparently the utterance of these estimates is in the psalmist's mind, and he is still thinking of speech. Neither calumny (ver. 3) nor the equally ignoble flattery of evil-doers (ver. 4) pollutes the lips of his ideal good man. If this reference to spoken estimates is allowed, the last clause of ver. 4 completes the references to the right use of speech. The obligation of speaking "truth with his heart" is pursued into a third region: that of vows or promises. These must be conceived as not religious vows, but, in accordance with the reference of the whole psalm to duties to neighbours, as oaths made to men. They must be

kept, whatever consequences may ensue. The law prohibited the substitution of another animal sacrifice for that which had been vowed (Lev. xxvii. 10); and the psalm uses the same word for "changeth," with evident allusion to the prohibition, which must therefore have been known to the psalmist.

Usury and bribery were common sins, as they still are in communities on the same industrial and judicial level as that mirrored in the psalm. Capitalists who "bite" the poor (for that is the literal meaning of the words for usurious taking of interest) and judges who condemn the innocent for gain are the blood-suckers of such societies. The avoidance of such gross sin is a most elementary illustration of walking uprightly, and could only have been chosen to stand in lieu of all other neighbourly virtues in an age when these sins were deplorably common. This draft of a God-pleasing character is by no means complete even from the Old Testament ethical point of view. There are two variations of it, which add important elements: that in Psalm xxiv., which seems to have been occasioned by the same circumstances; and the noble adaptation in Isa. xxxiii. 13–16, which is probably moulded on a reminiscence of both psalms. Add to these Micah's answer to the question what God requires of man (ch. vi. 8), and we have an interesting series, exhibiting the effects of the Law on the moral judgments of devout men in Israel.

The psalmist's last word goes beyond his question, in the clear recognition that such a character as he has outlined not only dwells in Jehovah's tent, but will stand unmoved, though all the world should rock. He does not see how far onward that "for ever" may stretch, but of this he is sure: that righteousness is the

one stable thing in the universe, and there may have shone before him the hope that it was possible to travel on beyond the horizon that bounds this life. "I shall be a guest in Jehovah's tent for ever," says the other psalm already quoted; "He shall never be moved," says this one. Both find their fulfilment in the great words of the Apostle who taught a completer ideal of love to men, because he had dwelt close by the perfect revelation of God's love: "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

PSALM XVI.

1 Preserve me, O God, for I take refuge in Thee
2 I have said to Jehovah, Thou art my Lord;
Good for me there is none besides Thee.
3 As for the saints which are in the earth,
They are the excellent, in whom is all my delight.
4 Their griefs are many who change [Jehovah] for another
I will not pour out their drink offerings of blood,
And will not take their names on my lips.

5 Jehovah is my allotted portion and my cup;
Thou art continually my lot.
6 The measuring lines have fallen for me in pleasant places
And my inheritance is fair to me.
7 I will bless Jehovah who has given me counsel;
Yea, in the night seasons my reins instruct me.
8 I set Jehovah before me continually,
Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved.

9 Therefore my heart rejoices, and my glory exults;
Yea, my flesh dwells in safety.
10 For Thou wilt not leave my soul to Sheol;
Thou wilt not suffer Thy Beloved One to see the pit.
11 Thou wilt make me know the path of life;
Before Thy face is fulness of joys;
Pleasures are in Thy right hand for evermore.

THE progress of thought in this psalm is striking. The singer is first a bold confessor in the face of idolatry and apostasy (vv. 1–4). Then the inward sweetness of his faith fills his soul, as is ever the reward of brave avowal, and he buries himself, bee-like in the pure delights of communion with Jehovah (vv. 5–8). Finally, on the ground of such experience,

he rises to the assurance that "its very sweetness yieldeth proof" that he and it are born for undying life (vv. 9–11). The conviction of immortality is then most vividly felt, when it results from the consciousness of a present full of God. The outpourings of a pure and wholesome mystic religion in the psalm are so entirely independent of the personality and environment of the singer that there is no need to encumber the study of it with questions of date. If we accept the opinion that the conception of resurrection was the result of intercourse with Persia, we shall have to give a post-exilic date to the psalm. But even if the general adoption of that belief was historically so motived, that does not forbid our believing that select souls, living in touch with God, rose to it long before. The peaks caught the glow while the valleys were filled with mists. The tone of the last section sounds liker that of a devout soul in the very act of grasping a wonderful new thought, which God was then and there revealing to him through his present experience, than of one who was simply repeating a theological truth become familiar to all.

The first turn of thought (vv. 1–4) is clear in its general purport. It is a profession of personal adherence to Jehovah and of attachment to His lovers, in the face of idol worship which had drawn away some. The brief cry for preservation at the beginning does not necessarily imply actual danger, but refers to the possible antagonism of the idol worshippers provoked by the psalmist's bold testimony. The two meanings of Martyr, a witness and a sufferer, are closely intertwined in fact. He needs to be preserved, and he has a claim to be so, for his profession of faith has brought the peril.

The remarkable expression in ver. 2 *b*. is best understood as unfolding the depth of what lies in saying, My God. It means the cleaving to Him of the whole nature as the all-comprehending supply of every desire and capacity. "Good for me is none besides Thee." This is the same high strain as in the cognate Psalm lxxiii. 25, where, as here, the joy of communion is seen in the very act of creating the confidence of immortality. The purest expression of the loftiest devotion lies in these few words. The soul that speaks thus to Jehovah turns next to Jehovah's friends and then to His foes. To the former it speaks, in ver. 3, of the gnarled obscurity of which the simplest clearing up is that adopted by the R.V. This requires a very small correction of the text, the omission of one letter, (*Waw* = and) before "excellent," and the transference to the second clause of "these," which the accents append clumsily to the first. If we regard the "to" at the beginning, as the R.V. does, as marking simply reference ("as for"), the verse is an independent sentence; but it is possible to regard the influence of "I have said" as still continuing, and in that case we should have what the psalmist said to the saints, following on what he said to Jehovah, which gives unity to the whole context, and is probably best. Cheyne would expunge the first clause as a gloss crept in from the margin; and that clears the sense, though the remedy is somewhat drastic, and a fine touch is lost, "I said to Thy loved ones,—these (and not the braggarts who strut as great men) are the truly excellent, in whom is all my delight." When temptations to forsake Jehovah are many, the true worshipper has to choose his company, and his devotion to his only Good will lead to penetrating insight into the

unreality of many shining reputations and the modest beauty of humble lives of godliness. Eyes which have been purged to see God, by seeing Him will see through much. Hearts that have learned to love Jehovah will be quick to discern kindred hearts, and, if they have found all good in Him, will surely find purest delight in them. The solitary confessor clasps the hands of his unknown fellows.

With dramatic abruptness he points to the unnamed recreants from Jehovah. "Their griefs are many—they exchange (Jehovah) for another." Apparently. then, there was some tendency in Israel to idolatry, which gives energy to the psalmist's vehement vow that he will not offer their libations of blood, nor take the abhorred names of the gods they pronounced into his lips. This state of things would suit but too much of Israel's history, during which temptations to idol worship were continually present, and the bloody libations would point to such abominations of human sacrifice as we know characterised the worship of Moloch and Chemosh. Cheyne sees in the reference to these a sign of the post-exilic date of the psalm; but was there any period after the exile in which there was danger of relapse to idolatry, and was not rather a rigid monotheism the great treasure which the exiles brought back? The trait seems rather to favour an earlier date.

In the second section (vv. 5–8) the devout soul suns itself in the light of God, and tells itself how rich it is. "The portion of mine inheritance" might mean an allotted share of either food or land, but ver. 6 favours the latter interpretation. "Cup" here is not so much an image for that which satisfies thirst, though that would be beautiful, as for that which is appointed

for one to experience. Such a use of the figure is familiar, and brings it into line with the other of inheritance, which is plainly the principal, as that of the cup is dropped in the following words. Every godly man has the same possession and the same prohibitions as the priests had. Like them he is landless, and instead of estates has Jehovah. They presented in mere outward fashion what is the very law of the devout life. Because God is the only true Good, the soul must have none other, and if it have forsaken all other by reason of the greater wealth of even partial possession of Him, it will be growingly rich in Him. He who has said unto the Lord, "Thou art my Lord," will with ever increasing decisiveness of choice and consciousness of sufficiency say, "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance." The same figure is continued in ver. 5 *b*. "My lot" is the same idea as "my portion," and the natural flow of thought would lead us to expect that Jehovah is both. That consideration combines with the very anomalous grammatical form of the word rendered "maintainest" to recommend the slight alteration adopted by Cheyne following Dyserinck and Bickell, by which "continually" is read for it. What God is rather than what He does is filling the psalmist's happy thoughts, and the depth of his blessedness already kindles that confidence in its perpetuity which shoots up to so bright a flame in the closing verses (cf. lxxiii.). The consciousness of perfect rest in perfect satisfaction of need and desires ever follows possession of God. So the calm rapture of ver. 6 is the true utterance of the heart acquainted with God, and of it alone. One possession only bears reflection. Whatever else a man has, if he has not Jehovah for his portion, some part of himself will stand stiffly out, dissentient and unsatis-

fied, and hinder him from saying "My inheritance is fair to me." That verdict of experience implies, as it stands in the Hebrew, subjective delight in the portion and not merely the objective worth of it. This is the peculiar pre-eminence of a God-filled life, that the Infinitely good is wholly Good to it, through all the extent of capacities and cravings. Who else can say the same? Blessed they whose delights are in God! He will ever delight them.

No wonder that the psalmist breaks into blessing; but it is deeply significant of the freedom from mere sentimental religion which characterises the highest flights of his devotion, that his special ground of blessing Jehovah is not inward peace of communion, but the wise guidance given thereby for daily difficulties. A God whose sweet sufficiency gives satisfaction for all desires and balm for every wound is much, but a God who by these very gifts makes duty plain, is more. The test of inward devotion is its bearing on common tasks. True wisdom is found in fellowship with God. Eyes which look on Him see many things more clearly. The "reins" are conceived of as the seat of the Divine voice. In Old Testament psychology they seem to stand for feelings rather than reason or conscience, and it is no mistake of the psalmist's when he thinks that through them God's counsel comes. He means much the same as we do when we say that devout instincts are of God. He will purify, ennoble and instruct even the lower propensities and emotions, so that they may be trusted to guide, when the heart is at rest in Him. "Prayer is better than sleep," says the Mohammedan call to devotion. "In the night seasons," says the psalmist, when things are more clearly seen in the dark than

by day, many a whisper from Jehovah steals into his ears.

The upshot of all is a firm resolve to make really his what is his. "I set Jehovah always before me"—since He is "always my lot." That effort of faith is the very life of devotion. We have any possession only while it is present to our thoughts. It is all one not to have a great estate and never to see it or think about it. True love is an intense desire for the presence of its object. God is only ours in reality when we are conscious of His nearness, and that is strange love of Him which is content to pass days without ever setting Him before itself. The effort of faith brings an ally and champion for faith, for "He is at my right hand," in so far as I set Him before me. "At my right hand,"—then I am at His left, and the left arm wears the shield, and the shield covers my head. Then He is close by my working hand, to direct its activity and to lay His own great hand on my feeble one, as the prophet did his on the wasted fingers of the sick king to give strength to draw the bow. The ally of faith secures the stability of faith. "I shall not be moved," either by the agitations of passions or by the shocks of fortune. A calm heart, which is not the same thing as a stagnant heart, is the heritage of him who has God at his side; and he who is fixed on that rock stands four-square to all the winds that blow. Foolhardy self-reliance says, I shall never be moved (x. 6), and the end of that boast is destruction. A good man, seduced by prosperity, may forget himself so far as to say it (xxx. 6), and the end of that has to be fatherly discipline, to bring him right. But to say "Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved" is but to claim the blessings belonging to the possession

of the only satisfying inheritance, even Jehovah Himself.

The heart that expands with such blessed consciousness of possessing God can chant its triumphant song even in front of the grave. So, in his closing strain the psalmist pours out his rapturous faith that his fellowship with God abolishes death. No worthy climax to the profound consciousness of communion already expressed, nor any satisfactory progress of thought justifying the "therefore" of ver. 9, can be made out with any explanation of the final verses, which eliminates the assurance of immortal life from them. The experiences of the devout life here are prophecies. These aspirations and enjoyments are to their possessor, not only authentic proofs "that God is and that He is the rewarder of the heart that seeks Him," but also witnesses of immortality not to be silenced. They "were not born for death," but, in their sweetness and incompleteness alike, point onwards to their own perpetuity and perfecting. If a man has been able to say and has said "My God," nothing will seem more impossible to him than that such a trifle as death should have power to choke his voice or still the outgoings of his heart towards, and its rest in, his God. Whatever may have been the current beliefs of the psalmist's time in regard to a future life, and whether his sunny confidence here abode with him in less blessed hours of less "high communion with the living God," or ebbed away, leaving him to the gloomier thoughts of other psalms, we need not try to determine. Here, at all events, we see his faith in the act of embracing the great thought, which may have been like the rising of a new sun in his sky—namely, the conviction that this his joy was joy for ever. A like depth of personal

experience of the sweetness of communion with God will always issue in like far-seeing assurance of its duration as unaffected by anything that touches only the physical husk of the true self. If we would be sure of immortal life, we must make the mortal a God-filled life.

The psalmist feels the glad certainty in all his complex nature, heart, soul, and flesh. All three have their portion in the joy which it brings. The foundation of the exultation of heart and soul and of the quiet rest of flesh is not so much the assurance that after death there will be life, and after the grave a resurrection, as the confidence that there will be no death at all. To "see the pit" is a synonym for experiencing death, and what is hoped for is exemption from it altogether, and a Divine hand leading him, as Enoch was led, along the high levels on a "path of life" which leads to God's right hand, without any grim descent to the dark valley below. Such an expectation may be called vain, but we must distinguish between the form and the substance of the psalmist's hope. Its essence was—unbroken and perfected communion with God, uninterrupted sense of possessing Him, and therein all delights and satisfactions. To secure these he dared to hope that for him death would be abolished. But he died, and assuredly he found that the unbroken communion for which he longed was persistent through death, and that in dying his hope that he should not die was fulfilled beyond his hope.

The correspondence between his effort of faith in ver. 8 and his final position in ver. 11 is striking. He who sets Jehovah continually before himself will, in due time, come where there are fulness of joys before God's face; and he who here, amid distractions and sorrows,

has kept Jehovah at his right hand as his counsellor, defender and companion, will one day stand at Jehovah's right hand, and be satisfied for evermore with the uncloying and inexhaustible pleasures that there abide.

The singer, whose clear notes thus rang above the grave, died and saw corruption. But, as the apostolic use of this psalm as a prophecy of Christ's resurrection has taught us, the apparent contradiction of his triumphal chant by the fact of his death did not prove it to be a vain dream. If there ever should be a life of absolutely unbroken communion, that would be a life in which death would be abolished. Jesus Christ is God's "Beloved" as no other is. He has conquered death as no other has. The psalm sets forth the ideal relation of the perfectly devout man to death and the future, and that ideal is a reality in Him, from whom the blessed continuity, which the psalmist was sure must belong to fellowship so close as was his with God, flows to all who unite themselves with Him. He has trodden the path of life which He shows to us, and it *is* life, at every step, even when it dips into the darkness of what men call death, whence it rises into the light of the Face which it is joy to see, and close to the loving strong Hand which holds and gives pleasures for evermore.

PSALM XVII.

1 Hear a righteous cause, Jehovah, attend to my cry;
Give ear to my prayer from no lips of guile.
2 From Thy face let my sentence go forth;
Thine eyes behold rightly.
3 Thou provest my heart, searchest it by night,
Triest me by fire: Thou findest not [anything];
Should I purpose evil, it shall not pass my mouth (?)
4 As for (During) the doings of men, by the word of Thy lips
I have kept [me from] the paths of the violent man.
5 My steps have held fast to Thy ways;
My feet have not slipped.

6 I, I call upon Thee, for Thou wilt answer me, O God·
Incline Thine ear unto me: hear my speech.
7 Magnify (Make wonderful) Thy loving-kindnesses Thou who
savest those who seek refuge
From those who rise [against them ?] by Thy right hand
8 Keep me as the pupil, the daughter of the eye;
In the shadow of Thy wing hide me
9 From the wicked, who lay me waste,
My enemies at heart, [who] ring me round.
10 Their heart they have shut up;
With their mouth they speak in arrogance.
11 In our steps, they already compass us about;
Their eyes they fix, to lay [us] on the ground.
12 He is like a lion who longs to rend,
And a young lion crouching in coverts.

13 Arise, Jehovah: meet his face: make him crouch;
Deliver my soul from the wicked [with] Thy sword,
14 From men [by] Thy hand, Jehovah, from men of the world,
[Having] their portion in [this] life, and [with] Thy hidden treasure
Thou fillest their belly;
They are full of sons, and leave their overabundance to their
children.
15 I, I shall in righteousness behold Thy face;
I shall be satisfied on awaking [with] Thy likeness.

THE investigations as to authorship and date yield the usual conflicting results. Davidic, say one school; undoubtedly post-exilic, say another, without venturing on closer definition; late in the Persian period, says Cheyne. Perhaps we may content ourselves with the modest judgment of Baethgen in his last book ("Handcommentar," 1892, p. 45): "The date of composition cannot be decided by internal indications." The background is the familiar one of causeless foes round an innocent sufferer, who flings himself into God's arms for safety, and in prayer enters into peace and hope. He is, no doubt, a representative of the *Ecclesia pressa*; but he is so just because his cry is intensely personal. The experience of one is the type for all, and a poet's prerogative is to cast his most thoroughly individual emotions into words that fit the universal heart. The psalm is called a "prayer," a title given to only four other psalms, none of which are in the First Book. It has three movements, marked by the repetition of the name of God, which does not appear elsewhere, except in the doubtful verse 14. These three are vv. 1–5, in which the cry for help is founded on a strong profession of innocence; vv. 6–12, in which it is based on a vivid description of the enemies; and vv. 13–15, in which it soars into the pure air of mystic devotion, and thence looks down on the transient prosperity of the foe and upwards, in a rapture of hope, to the face of God.

The petition proper, in vv. 1, 2, and its ground, are both strongly marked by conscious innocence, and therefore sound strange to our ears, trained as we have been by the New Testament to deeper insight into sin. This sufferer asks God to "hear righteous-

ness," *i.e.* his righteous cause. He pleads the *bona fides* of his prayer, the fervour of which is marked by its designation as "my *cry*," the high-pitched note usually the expression of joy, but here of sore need and strong desire. Boldly he asks for his "sentence from Thy face," and the ground of that petition is that "Thine eyes behold rightly." Was there, then, no inner baseness that should have toned down such confidence? Was this prayer not much the same as the Pharisee's in Christ's parable? The answer is partly found in the considerations that the innocence professed is specially in regard to the occasions of the psalmist's present distress, and that the acquittal by deliverance which he asks is God's testimony that as to these he was slandered and clear. But, further, the strong professions of heart-cleanness and outward obedience which follow are not so much denials of any sin as avowals of sincere devotion and honest submission of life to God's law. They are "the answer of a good conscience towards God," expressed, indeed, more absolutely than befits Christian consciousness, but having nothing in common with Pharisaic self-complacency. The modern type of religion which recoils from such professions, and contents itself with always confessing sins which it has given up hope of overcoming, would be all the better for listening to the psalmist and aiming a little more vigorously and hopefully at being able to say, "I know nothing against myself." There is no danger in such a saying, if it be accompanied by "Yet am I not hereby justified" and by "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse Thou me from secret faults."

The general drift of vv. 3–5 is clear, but the precise meaning and connection are extremely obscure. Pro-

bably the text is faulty. It has been twisted in all sorts of ways, the Masoretic accents have been disregarded, the division of verses set aside, and still no proposed rendering of parts of vv. 3, 4, is wholly satisfactory. The psalmist deals with heart, lips, feet—that is, thoughts, words, and deeds—and declares the innocence of all. But difficulties begin when we look closer. The first question is as to the meaning and connection of the word rendered in the A.V. and R.V., "I am purposed." It may be a first person singular or an infinitive used as a noun or even a noun, meaning, in both the latter cases, substantially the same, *i.e.* my thinking or my thoughts. It is connected by the accents with what follows; but in that case the preceding verb "find" is left without an object, and hence many renderings attach the word to the preceding clause, and so get "Thou shalt find no [evil] thoughts in me." This division of the clauses leaves the words rendered, by A.V. and R.V., "My mouth shall not transgress," standing alone. There is no other instance of the verb standing by itself with that meaning, nor is "mouth" clearly the subject. It may as well be the object, and the clause be, "[It] shall not pass my mouth." If that is the meaning, we have to look to the preceding word as defining what it is that is thus to be kept unuttered, and so detach it from the verb "find," as the accents do. The knot has been untied in two ways: "My [evil] purpose shall not pass," etc., or, taking the word as a verb and regarding the clause as hypothetical, "Should I think evil, it shall not pass," etc.

Either of these renderings has the advantage of retaining the recognised meaning of the verb and of avoiding neglect of the accent. Such a rendering has been

objected to as inconsistent with the previous clause, but the psalmist may be looking back to it, feeling that his partial self-knowledge makes it a bold statement, and thus far limiting it, that *if* any evil thought is found in his heart, it is sternly repressed in silence.

Obscurity continues in ver. 4. The usual rendering, "As for [or, During] the works of men, by the word of Thy mouth I have kept me," etc., is against the accents, which make the principal division of the verse fall after "lips"; but no satisfactory sense results if the accentuation is followed unless we suppose a verb implied, such as, *e.g.*, *stand fast* or the like, so getting the profession of steadfastness in the words of God's lips, in face of men's self-willed doings. But this is precarious, and probably the ordinary way of cutting the knot by neglecting the accents is best. In any case the avowal of innocence passes here from thoughts and words to acts. The contrast of the psalmist's closed mouth and God's lips is significant, even if unintended. Only he who silences much that rises in his heart can hear God speaking. "I kept me from," is a very unusual meaning for the word employed, which generally signifies to *guard* or *watch*, but here seems to mean *to take heed so as to avoid.* Possibly the preposition *from*, denoted by a single letter, has fallen out before "paths." This negative avoidance precedes positive walking in God's ways, since the poet's position is amidst evil men. Goodness has to learn to say No to men, if it is ever to say Yes to God. The foot has to be forcibly plucked and vigilantly kept from foul ways before it can be planted firmly in "Thy paths." By holding fast to courses appointed by God stability is ensured. Thus the closing clause of this first part is rather

an acknowledgment of the happy result of devoted cleaving to God than an assertion of self-secured steadfastness. "My feet do not slip," not so much because they are strong as because the road is good, and the Guide's word and hand ready.

The second part repeats the prayer for help, but bases it on the double ground of God's character and acts and of the suppliant's desperate straits; and of these two the former comes first in the prayer, though the latter has impelled to the prayer. Faith may be helped to self-consciousness by the sense of danger, but when awakened it grasps God's hand first and then faces its foes. In this part of the psalm the petitions, the aspects of the Divine character and working, and the grim picture of dangers are all noteworthy. The petitions by their number and variety reveal the pressure of trouble, each new prick of fear or pain forcing a new cry and each cry recording a fresh act of faith tightening its grasp. The "I" in ver. 6 is emphatic, and may be taken as gathering up the psalmist's preceding declarations and humbly laying them before God as a plea: "*I, who thus cleave to Thy ways,* call upon Thee, and my prayer is that of faith, which is sure of answer." But that confidence does not make petition superfluous, but rather encourages it. The assurance that "Thou wilt answer" is the reason for the prayer, "Incline Thine ear." Naturally at such a moment the name of God springs to the psalmist's lips, but significantly it is not the name found in the other two parts of the psalm. There He is invoked as "Jehovah," here as "God." The variation is not merely rhetorical, but the name which connotes power is appropriate in a prayer for deliverance from peril so extreme. "Magnify [or make wonderful] Thy loving-kindnesses" is a petition

containing at once a glimpse of the psalmist's danger, for escape from which nothing short of a wonder of power will avail, and an appeal to God's delight in magnifying His name by the display of His mercy. The prayer sounds arrogant, as if the petitioner thought himself important enough to have miracles wrought for him; but it is really most humble, for the very wonder of the loving-kindness besought is that it should be exercised for such a one. God wins honour by saving a poor man who cries to Him; and it is with deep insight into the heart of God that this man presents himself as offering an occasion, in which God must delight, to flash the glory of His loving power before dull eyes. The petitions grow in boldness as they go on, and culminate in two which occur in similar contiguity in the great Song of Moses in Deut. xxxii.: "Keep me as the pupil of Thy eye." What closeness of union with God that lovely figure implies, and what sedulous guardianship it implores! "In the shadow of Thy wings hide me." What tenderness of fostering protection that ascribes to God, and what warmth and security it asks for man! The combination and order of these two petitions may teach us that, if we are to be "kept," we must be hidden; that if these frail lives of ours are to be dear to God as the apple of His eye, they must be passed nestling close by His side. Deep, secret communion with Him is the condition of His protection of us, as another psalm, using the same image, has it: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."

The aspects of the Divine character, which the psalmist employs to move God's heart and to encourage his own, are contained first in the name "God," and next in the reference to His habitual dealings with

trusting souls, in ver 7. From of old it has been His way to be the Saviour of such as take refuge in Him from their enemies, and His right hand has shielded them. That past is a prophecy which the psalmist grasps in faith. He has in view instances enough to warrant an induction absolutely certain. He knows the law of the Divine dealings, and is sure that anything may happen rather than that it shall fail. Was he wrong in thus characterising God? Much in his experience and in ours looks as if he were; but they who most truly understand what help or salvation truly is will most joyously dwell in the sunny clearness of this confidence, which will not be clouded for them, though their own and others' trust is not answered by what sense calls deliverance.

The eye which steadily looks on God can look calmly at dangers. It is with no failure of faith that the poet's thoughts turn to his enemies. Fears that have become prayers are already more than half conquered. The psalmist would move God to help, not himself to despair, by recounting his perils. The enemy "spoil" him or lay him waste, the word used for the ravages of invaders. They are "enemies in soul"—*i.e.*, deadly—or perhaps "against [my] soul" or life. They are pitiless and proud, closing their hearts, which prosperity has made "fat" or arrogant, against the entrance of compassion, and indulging in gasconading boasts of their own power and contemptuous scoffs at his weakness. They ring him round, watching his steps. The text has a sudden change here from singular to plural, and back again to singular, reading "*our* steps," and "They have compassed *me*," which the Hebrew margin alters to "us." The wavering between the singular and plural is accounted for by

the upholders of the Davidic authorship by a reference to him and his followers, and by the advocates of the theory that the speaker is the personified Israel by supposing that the mask falls for a moment, and the "me," which always means "us," gives place to the collective. Ver. 11 *b* is ambiguous in consequence of the absence of an object to the second verb. To "set the eyes" is to watch fixedly and eagerly; and the purpose of the gaze is in the next clause stated by an infinitive with a preposition, not by a participle, as in the A.V. The verb is sometimes transitive and sometimes intransitive, but the former is the better meaning here, and the omitted object is most naturally "us" or "me." The sense, then, will be that the enemies eagerly watch for an opportunity to cast down the psalmist, so as to lay him low on the earth. The intransitive meaning "to bow down" is taken by some commentators. If that is adopted (as it is by Hupfeld and others), the reference is to "our steps" in the previous clause, and the sense of the whole is that eager eyes watch for these "bowing to the ground," that is stumbling. But such a rendering is harsh, since steps are always on the ground. Baethgen ("Handcommentar"), on the strength of Num. xxi. 22, the only place where the verb occurs with the same preposition as here, and which he takes as meaning "to turn aside to field or vineyard—*i.e.*, to plunder them"—would translate, "They direct their eyes to burst into the land," and supposes the reference to be to some impending invasion. A similar variation in number to that in ver. 11 occurs in ver. 12, where the enemies are concentrated into one. The allusion is supposed to be to some one conspicuous leader—*e.g.*, Saul—but probably the change is merely an illustration of the

carelessness as to such grammatical accuracy characteristic of emotional Hebrew poetry. The familiar metaphor of the lurking lion may have been led up to in the poet's imagination by the preceding picture of the steadfast gaze of the enemy, like the glare of the green eyeballs flashing from the covert of a jungle.

The third part (vv. 13–15) renews the cry for deliverance, and unites the points of view of the preceding parts in inverted order, describing first the enemies and then the psalmist, but with these significant differences, the fruits of his communion with God, that now the former are painted, not in their fierceness, but in their transitory attachments and low delights, and that the latter does not bemoan his own helplessness nor build on his own integrity, but feeds his soul on his confidence of the vision of God and the satisfaction which it will bring. The smoke clouds that rolled in the former parts have caught fire, and one clear shoot of flame aspires heavenward. He who makes his needs known to God gains for immediate answer "the peace of God, which passeth understanding," and can wait God's time for the rest. The crouching lion is still ready to spring; but the psalmist hides himself behind God, whom he asks to face the brute and make him grovel at his feet ("Make him bow down," the same word used for a lion couchant in Gen. xlix. 9 and Num. xxiv. 9). The rendering of ver. 13 *b*, "the wicked, who is Thy sword," introduces an irrelevant thought; and it is better to regard the sword as God's weapon that slays the crouching wild beast. The excessive length of ver. 14 and the entirely pleonastic "from men (by) Thy hand, O Lord," suggest textual corruption. The thought runs more smoothly, though

not altogether clearly, if these words are omitted. There remains a penetrating characterisation of the enemy in the sensuous limitations and mistaken aims of his godless being, which may be satiated with low delights, but never satisfied, and has to leave them all at last. He is no longer dreaded, but pitied. His prayer has cleared the psalmist's eyes and lifted him high enough to see his foes as they are. They are "men of the world," belonging, by the set of their lives, to a transitory order of things—an anticipation of New Testament language about "the children of this world." "Their portion is in [this] life," while the psalmist's is God (xvi. 5). They have chosen to have their good things in their lifetime. Hopes, desires, aims, tastes, are all confined within the narrow bounds of time and sense, than which there can be no greater folly. Such limitation will often seem to succeed, for low aims are easily reached; and God sometimes lets men have their fill of the goods at which their perverted choice clutches. But even so the choice is madness and misery, for the man, gorged with worldly good, has yet to leave it, however unwilling to loosen his hold. He cannot use his goods; and it is no comfort to him, sent away naked into darkness of death, that his descendants revel in what was his.

How different the contrasted conditions of the hunted psalmist and his enemies look when the light of such thoughts streams on them! The helpless victim towers above his persecutors, for his desires go up to Him who abides and saturates with His blessed fulness the heart that aspires to Him. Terrors vanish; foes are forgotten; every other wish is swallowed up in one, which is a confidence as well as a desire. The psalmist neither grudges, nor is perplexed by, the prosperity of

the wicked. The mysteries of men's earthly lot puzzle those who stand at a lower elevation; but they do not disturb the soul on these supreme heights of mystic devotion, where God is seen to be the only good, and the hungry heart is filled with Him. Assuredly the psalmist's closing expectation embodies the one contrast worth notice: that between the present gross and partial satisfactions of sense-bound lives and the calm, permanent, full delights of communion with God. But does he limit his hopes to such "hours of high communion with the living God" as may be ours, even while the foe rings us round and earth holds us down? Possibly so, but it is difficult to find a worthy meaning for "when I awake" unless it be from the sleep of death. Possibly, too, the allusion to the men of the world as "leaving their substance" makes the reference to a future beatific vision more likely. Death is to them the stripping off of their chosen portion; it is to him whose portion is God the fuller possession of all that he loves and desires. Cheyne ("Orig. of Psalt.," p. 407) regards the "awaking" as that from the "sleep" of the intermediate state by "the passing of the soul into a resurrection body." He is led to the recognition of the doctrine of the resurrection here by his theory of the late date of the psalm and the influence of Zoroastrianism on it. But it is not necessary to suppose an allusion to the resurrection. Rather the psalmist's confidence is the offspring of his profound consciousness of present communion, and we see here the very process by which a devout man, in the absence of a clear revelation of the future, reached up to a conclusion to which he was led by his experience of the inmost reality of friendship with God. The impotence of death on the relation of the devout soul to God is a postulate of faith, whether

formulated as an article of faith or not. Probably the psalmist had no clear conception of a future life; but certainly he had a distinct assurance of it, because he felt that the very "sweetness" of present fellowship with God "yielded proof that it was born for immortality."

PSALM XVIII.

1 Heartily do I love Thee, Jehovah, my strength!
2 Jehovah, my rock and my fortress and my deliverer,
My God, my rock in whom I take refuge,
My shield and the horn of my salvation and my high tower!
3 I call upon Him who is to be praised, Jehovah;
And from mine enemies am I saved.

4 The breakers of death ringed me round,
And streams of destruction terrified me.
5 The cords of Sheol encircled me;
The snares of death fronted me.
6 In my distress I called on Jehovah,
And to my God I loudly cried;
He heard my voice from His palace-temple,
And my loud crying before Him entered His ears.

7 Then the earth rocked and reeled,
And the foundations of the mountains quivered
And rocked again, for He was wroth.
8 Smoke went up in His nostrils,
And fire from His mouth devoured;
Brands came blazing from Him.
9 And He bowed the heavens and came down,
And cloud gloom [was] below His feet.
10 And He rode upon the cherub and flew,
And came swooping on the wings of the wind.
11 He made darkness His covert, His tent round about Him,
Darkness of waters and cloud masses of the skies.
12 From the brightness before Him there passed through His
cloud-masses
Hail and brands of fire.
13 And Jehovah thundered in the heavens,
And the Most High gave forth His voice.

14 And He sent forth His arrows and scattered them,
And lightnings many, and flung them into panic.
15 And the beds of the waters were seen,
And the foundations of the earth bared,
At Thy rebuke, Jehovah,
At the blast of the breath of Thy nostrils.

16 He stretched from on high : He took me;
He drew me from many waters.
17 He rescued me from my strong enemy
And from my haters, because they were too mighty for me.
18 They fell on me in the day of my calamity,
But Jehovah became as a staff to me.
19 And He brought me out into a wide place;
He delivered me, because He delighted in me.

20 Jehovah treated me according to my righteousness;
According to the cleanness of my hands He returned [recompense]
to me.
21 For I kept the ways of Jehovah,
And did not part myself by sin from my God.
22 For all His judgments were before me,
And His statutes did I not put away from me.
23 And I was without fault with Him,
And I kept myself from my iniquity.
24 Therefore Jehovah returned [recompense] to me according to my
righteousness,
According to the cleanness of my hands before His eyes.

25 With the gracious man Thou showest Thyself gracious;
With the faultless man Thou showest Thyself faultless.
26 With him who purifies himself Thou showest Thyself pure,
And with the perverse Thou showest Thyself froward.
27 For Thou savest humbled people,
And eyes uplifted Thou dost bring low.

28 For Thou lightest my lamp;
Jehovah my God brightens my darkness.
29 For by Thee I run down a troop,
And through my God I spring over a rampart.
30 As for God, His way is faultless;
The word of Jehovah is tried (as by fire):
A shield is He to all who take refuge in Him.
31 For who is God but Jehovah,
And who is a rock besides our God?

32 [It is] God who girded me with strength,
And made my way faultless;
33 Who made my feet like hinds' [feet],
And made me stand upon my high places;
34 Who schooled my hands for war,
So that my arms bend a bow of brass.

35 And Thou didst give me the shield of Thy salvation,
And Thy right hand upheld me,
And Thy humility made me great.
36 Thou didst broaden under me [a path for] my step,
And my ankles did not give.

37 I pursued my enemies, and overtook them;
And I did not turn till I had consumed them.
38 I shattered them, and they could not rise;
They fell beneath my feet.
39 And Thou girdedst me with might for battle;
Thou didst bring my assailants to their knees under me.
40 And my enemies Thou madest to turn their backs to me,
And my haters—I annihilated them.

41 They shrieked, and there was no helper,
To Jehovah, and He answered them not.
42 I pounded them like dust before the wind;
Like street mud I emptied them out.

43 Thou didst deliver me from the strifes of the people;
Thou didst set me for a head of the nations;
A people whom I knew not served me.
44 At the hearing of the ear they made themselves obedient to me;
The children of the foreigner came feigning to me.
45 The children of the foreigner faded away,
And came trembling from their strongholds.

46 Jehovah lives, and blessed be my rock;
And exalted be the God of my salvation,
47 The God who gave me revenges
And subdued peoples under me,
48 My deliverer from my enemies:
Yea, from my assailants Thou didst set me on high,
From the man of violence didst Thou rescue me.

49 Therefore will I give Thee thanks among the nations, Jehovah;
And to Thy name will I sing praise.

50 He magnifies salvations for His king,
And works loving-kindness for His anointed,
For David and for his seed for evermore.

THE description of the theophany (vv. 7–19) and that of the psalmist's God-won victories (vv. 32–46) appear to refer to the same facts, transfigured in the former case by devout imagination and presented in the latter in their actual form. These two portions make the two central masses round which the psalm is built up. They are connected by a transitional section, of which the main theme is the power of character to determine God's aspect to a man as exemplified in the singer's experience; and they are preceded and followed by an introduction and a conclusion, throbbing with gratitude and love to Jehovah, the Deliverer.

The Davidic authorship of this psalm has been admitted even by critics who are slow to recognise it. Cheyne asks, as if sure of a negative answer, "What is there in it that suggests the history of David?" ("Orig. of Psalter," p. 205). Baethgen, who "suspects" that a Davidic psalm has been "worked over" for use in public worship, may answer the question: "The following points speak for the Davidic authorship. The poet is a military commander and king, who wages successful wars, and subdues peoples whom he hitherto did not know. There is no Israelite king to whom the expressions in question in the psalm apply so closely as is the case with David." To these points may be added the allusions to earlier trials and perils, and the distinct correspondence, in a certain warmth and inwardness of personal relation to Jehovah, with the other psalms attributed to David, as well as the pregnant use of the word *to flee to a refuge*, applied

to the soul's flight to God, which we find here (ver. 2) and in the psalms ascribed to him. If the clear notes of the psalm be the voice of personal experience, there is but one author possible—namely, David—and the glow and intensity of the whole make the personification theory singularly inadequate. It is much easier to believe that David used the word "temple" or "palace" for Jehovah's heavenly dwelling, than that the "I" of the psalm, with his clinging sense of possession in Jehovah, his vivid remembrance of sorrows, his protestations of integrity, his wonder at his own victories, and his triumphant praise, is not a man, but a frosty personification of the nation.

The preluding invocation in vv. 1–3 at once touches the high-water mark of Old Testament devotion, and is conspicuous among its noblest utterances. Nowhere else in Scripture is the form of the word employed which is here used for "love." It has special depth and tenderness. How far into the centre this man had penetrated, who could thus isolate and unite Jehovah and himself, and could feel that they two were alone and knit together by love! The true estimate of Jehovah's ways with a man will always lead to that resolve to love, based on the consciousness of God's love to him. Happy they who learn that lesson by retrospect; happier still if they gather it from their sorrows while these press! Love delights in addressing the beloved and heaping tender names on its object, each made more tender and blessed by that appropriating "my." It seems more accordant with the fervent tone of the psalm to regard the reiterated designations in ver. 2 as vocatives, than to take "Jehovah" and "God" as subjects and the other names as predicates. Rather the whole is one long,

loving accumulation of dear names, a series of invocations, in which the restful heart murmurs to itself how rich it is and is never wearied of saying, "my delight and defence." As in Psalm xvii., the name of Jehovah occurs twice, and that of God once. Each of these is expanded, as it were, by the following epithets, and the expansion becomes more extended as it advances, beginning with one member in ver. 1, having three in ver. 2 *a* and four in ver. 2 *b*. Leaving out the Divine names proper, there are seven in ver. 2, separated into two groups by the name of God. It may be observed there is a general correspondence between the two sets, each beginning with "rock" (though the word is different in the two clauses), each having the metaphor of a fortress, and "shield and horn of salvation," roughly answering to "Deliverer." The first word for *rock* is more properly *crag* or *cliff*, thus suggesting inaccessibility, and the second a *rock mass*, thus giving the notion of firmness or solidity. The shade of difference need not be pressed, but the general idea is that of safety, or by elevation above the enemy and by reason of the unchangeable strength of Jehovah. In that lofty eyrie, a man may look down on all the armies of earth, idly active on the plain. That great Rock towers unchangeable above fleeting things. The river at its base runs past, the woods nestling at its feet bud and shed their leaves, but it stands the same. David had many a time found shelter among the hills and caves of Judah and the South land, and it may not be fancy that sees reminiscences of these experiences in his song. The beautiful figure for trust embodied in the word in 2 *b* belongs to the metaphor of the rock. It is found with singular appropriateness in Psalm lvii., which the title ascribes

to David "in the cave," the sides of which bent above him and sheltered him, like a great pair of wings, and possibly suggested the image, "In the shadow of Thy wings will I take refuge." The difference between "fortress" and "high tower" is slight, but the former gives more prominence to the idea of strength, and the latter to that of elevation, both concurring in the same thought as was expressed by "rock," but with the additional suggestion of Jehovah as the home of the soul. Safety, then, comes through communion. Abiding in God is seclusion from danger. "Deliverer" stands last in the first set, saying in plain words what the preceding had put in figures. "My shield and the horn of my salvation" come in the centre of the second set, in obedience to the law of variety in reiteration which the poet's artistic instincts impose. They shift the figure to that of a warrior in actual conflict. The others picture a fugitive from enemies, these a fighter. The shield is a defensive weapon; horns are offensive ones, and the combination suggests that in conflict we are safe by the interposition of God's covering power, and are armed by the same power for striking at the foe. That power ensures salvation, whether in the narrower or wider sense. Thus Jehovah is all the armour and all the refuge of His servant. To trust Him is to have His protection cast around and His power infused for conflict and victory. The end of all life's experience is to reveal Him in these characters, and they have rightly learned its lessons whose song of retrospect begins with "I will love Thee, Jehovah," and pours out at His feet all happy names expressive of His sufficiency and of the singer's rest in possessing Him. Ver. 3 is not a resolution for the future—"I will call; . . . so shall I be saved"—but the summing up

of experience in a great truth: "I call, . . . and I am saved." It unfolds the meaning of the previous names of God, and strikes the key-note for the magnificent sequel.

The superb idealisation of past deliverances under the figure of a theophany is prepared for by a retrospect of dangers, which still palpitates with the memory of former fears. "A sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things," and a joy's crown of joy is remembering past perils. No better description of David's early life could have been given than that contained in the two vivid figures of vv. 4 and 5. If we adopt the more congruous reading of the other recension of the psalm in 2 Sam. xxii., we have in both members of ver. 4 a parallel metaphor. Instead of "sorrows" or "cords" (both of which renderings are possible for the text of the psalm here), it reads "breakers," corresponding with "floods" in the second clause. "Destruction" is better than *ungodly men* as the rendering of the unusual word "Belial." Thus the psalmist pictures himself as standing on a diminishing bit of solid ground, round which a rising flood runs strong, breaking on its crumbling narrowness. Islanded thus, he is all but lost. With swift transition he casts the picture of his distress into another metaphor. Now he is a hunted creature, surrounded and confronted by cords and snares. Sheol and Death have marked him for their prey, and are drawing their nets round him. What is left for him? One thing only. He has a voice, and he has a God. In his despair one piercing cry breaks from him; and, wonder of wonders, that thin shoot of prayer rises right into the heavenly palace-temple and the ears of God. The repetition of "I called upon the Lord" connects this with ver. 3 as the experience on which the generalisation there is based.

His extremity of peril had not paralysed the psalmist's grasp of God as still "my God," and his confidence is vindicated. There is an eloquent contrast between the insignificance of the cause and the stupendous grandeur of the effect: one poor man's shrill cry and a shaking earth and all the dread pomp attending an interposing God. A cupful of water poured into a hydraulic ram sets in motion power that lifts tons; the prayer of faith brings the dread magnificence of Jehovah into the field. The reading of 2 Samuel is preferable in the last clause of ver. 6, omitting the superfluous "before Him."

The phenomena of a thunderstorm are the substratum of the grand description of Jehovah's delivering self-manifestation. The garb is lofty poetry; but a definite fact lies beneath, namely some deliverance in which the psalmist saw Jehovah's coming in storm and lightning flash to destroy, and therefore to save. Faith sees more truly because more deeply than sense. What would have appeared to an ordinary looker-on as merely a remarkable escape was to its subject the manifestation of a present God. Which eye sees the "things that are,"—that which is cognisant only of a concatenation of events, or that which discerns a Person directing these? The cry of this hunted man has for first effect the kindling of the Divine "wrath," which is represented as flaming into action in the tremendous imagery of vv. 7 and 8. The description of the storm in which God comes to help the suppliant does not begin with these verses, as is commonly understood. The Divine power is not in motion yet, but is, as it were, gathering itself up for action. The complaining prayer is boldly treated as bringing to God's knowledge His servant's straits, and the knowledge as moving Him to wrath towards the enemies of one who takes shelter beneath

His wings. "What have I here that my"—servant is thus bestead? saith the Lord. The poet can venture to paint a picture with the pen, which the painter dare not attempt with the pencil. The anger of Jehovah is described in words of singular daring, as rising like smoke from His nostrils and pouring in fire from His lips, from which blazing brands issue. No wonder that the earth reels even to the roots of the mountains, as unable to endure that wrath! The frank anthropomorphism of the picture, of which the features are taken from the hard breathing of an angry man or animal (compare Job's crocodile in Job xli. 10-13), and the underlying conception are equally offensive to many; but as for the former, the more "gross" the humanising of the picture, the less likely is it to be mistaken for prose fact, and the more easy to apprehend as symbol: and as for the latter, the New Testament endorses the conception of the "wrath of God," and bids us take heed lest, if we cast it away, we maim His love. This same psalm hymns Jehovah's "gentleness"; and the more deeply His love is apprehended, the more surely will His wrath be discerned as its necessary accompaniment. The dark orb and its radiant sister move round a common centre.

Thus kindled, God's wrath flashes into action, as is wonderfully painted in that great storm piece in vv. 9–15. The stages of a violent thunder tempest are painted with unsurpassable force and brevity.

First we see the low clouds: far nearer the trembling earth than the hidden blue was, and seeming to press down with leaden weight, their boding blackness is above us; but

> "Whose foot shall we see emerge,
> Whose from the straining topmost dark?"

Their low gathering is followed by the sudden rush of wind, which breaks the awful calm. In its "sound," the psalmist hears the winnowing of mighty wings: those of the cherub on whom, as a living chariot, Jehovah sits throned. This is called "mythology." Is it not rather a poetic personification of elemental powers, which gives emphasis to their being God's instruments? The cherubim are in Scripture represented in varying forms and with different attributes. In Ezekiel they assume a composite form, due apparently to Babylonian influences; but here there is no trace of that, and the absence of such strongly supports a pre-exilic date.

Blacker grows the gloom, in which awed hearts are conscious of a present Deity shrouded behind the livid folds of the thunder-clouds, as in a tent. Down rushes the rain; the darkness is "a darkness of waters," and also "thick clouds of the skies," or "cloud masses," a mingled chaos of rain and cloud. Then lightning tears a way through the blackness, and the language becomes abrupt, like the flash. In vv. 12 and 13 the fury of the storm rages. Blinding brightness and deafening thunder-claps gleam and rattle through the broken words. Probably ver. 12 should be rendered, "From the brightness before Him there came through His clouds hail and brands of fire." Hidden in the cloudy tent is the light of Jehovah's presence, sparkles from which, flung forth by Him, pierce the solid gloom; and men call them lightnings. Then thunder rolls, the voice of the Most High. The repetition in ver. 13 of "hail and brands of fire" gives much abrupt force, and one is unwilling to part with it. The reason for omitting it from the text is the want of grammatical connection, but that is rather a reason for retaining it, as the isolated clause breaks in on the

continuity of the sentence, just as the flash shoots suddenly out of the cloud. These lightnings are God's arrows; and, as they are showered down in flights, the psalmist's enemies, unnamed since ver. 3, scatter in panic. The ideal character of the whole representation is plain from the last element in it—the description in ver. 15 of laying bare the sea's depths, as the waters were parted at the Exodus. That voice and the fierce blast from these fire-breathing nostrils have dried the streams, and the oozy bed is seen. God's "rebuke" has power to produce physical changes. The earthquake at the beginning and the empty ocean bed at the end are both somewhat outside the picture of the storm, and complete the representation of all nature as moved by the theophany.

Then comes the purpose of all the dread magnificence, strangely small except to the psalmist. Heaven and earth have been shaken, and lightnings set leaping through the sky, for nothing greater than to drag one half-drowned man from the floods. But the result of the theophany is small only in the same fashion as its cause was small. This same poor man cried, and the cry set Jehovah's activity in motion. The deliverance of a single soul may seem a small thing, but if the single soul has prayed it is no longer small, for God's good name is involved. A nation is disgraced if its meanest subject is left to die in the hands of foreign enemies, and blood and treasure are not wasted if poured out lavishly for his rescue. God cannot let a suppliant who has taken shelter in His tent be dragged thence. Therefore there is no disproportion between the theophany and the individual deliverance which is its sole result.

The psalmist lays aside the figure in vv. 17, 18, and

comes to the bare fact of his deliverance from enemies, and perhaps from one especially formidable ("my enemy," ver. 17). The prose of the whole would have been that he was in great danger and without means of averting it, but had a hair-breadth escape. But the outside of a fact is not all of it; and in this mystical life of ours poetry gets nearer the heart of things than does prose, and religion nearer than either. It is no miracle, in the narrow meaning of that word, which the psalmist sings; but his eye has seen the unseen force which moves all visible events. We may see the same apocalypse of a present Jehovah, if our eyes are purged, and our hearts pure. It is always true that the cry of a trustful soul pierces heaven and moves God; it is always true that He comes to His servant sinking and crying, "Lord, save me; I perish." The scene on the Galilean lake when Christ's strong grasp held Peter up, because his fear struck out a spark of faith, though his faith was darkened with fear, is ever being repeated.

The note slightly touched at the close of the description of the deliverance dominates the second part of the psalm (vv. 20–31), of which the main theme is the correspondence of God's dealings with character, as illustrated in the singer's experience, and thence generalised into a law of the Divine administration. It begins with startling protestations of innocence. These are rounded into a whole by the repetition, at the beginning and end, of the same statement that God dealt with the psalmist according to his righteousness and clean-handedness. If the author is David, this voice of a good conscience must have been uttered before his great fall, after which he could, indeed, sing of forgiveness and restoring grace, but never again of

integrity. Unlike as the tone of these verses is to that deeper consciousness of sin which is not the least of Christ's gifts, the truth which they embody is as much a part of the Christian as of the earlier revelation. True, penitence must now mingle with conscious rectitude more abundantly than it does in this psalm; but it is still and for ever true that God deals with His servants according to their righteousness. Cherished sin separates from Him, and forces His love to leave cries for help many times unanswered, in order that, filled with the fruit of their doings, His people may have a wholesome fear of again straying from the narrow way. Unless a Christian can say, "I keep myself from mine iniquity," he has no right to look for the sunshine of God's face to gladden his eyes, nor for the strength of God's hand to pluck his feet from the net. In noble and daring words, the psalmist proclaims as a law of God's dealings his own experience generalised (vv. 25–27). It is a bold reversal of the ordinary point of view to regard man as taking the initiative and God as following his lead. And yet is not life full of solemn facts confirmatory of the truth that God is to a man what the man is to God? That is so, both subjectively and objectively. Subjectively our conceptions of God vary with our moral nature, and objectively the dealings of God are moulded according to that nature. There is such a thing as colour blindness in regard to the Divine character, whereby some men cannot see the green of faithful love or the red of wrath, but each beholds that in God which his vision fits him to see; and the many-sided dealings of God are different in their incidence upon different characters, so that the same heat melts wax and hardens clay; and further the actual dealings are

accurately adapted to the state of their objects, so that each gets what he needs most: the loving heart, sweet love tokens from the Divine Lover; the perverse, thwartings which come from a God "contrary" to them who are contrary to Him. "The history of the world is the judgment of the world." But the first of the designations of character in ver. 25 hints that before man's initiative had been God's; for "merciful" is the pregnant word occurring so often in the Psalter, and so impossible to translate by any one word. It means, as we have already had occasion to point out, one who is the subject of the Divine loving-kindness, and who therefore loves God in return. Here it seems rather to be taken in the sense of loving than of beloved. He who exercises this loving-kindness, whether towards God or man, shall find in God One who exercises it to him. But the word itself regards man's loving-kindness towards God as being the echo of God's, and so the very first step in determining the mutual relations is God's, and but for it there would never have been that in man which God could answer by showing Himself as loving. The contrasted dealings and characters are summed up in the familiar antithesis of ver. 27. The "afflicted" or humble are the type of God-pleasing character, since humility, such as befits dependent creatures, is the mother of all goodness, and "high looks" the master sin, and the whole drift of Providence is to lift the lowly and abase the proud.

The psalmist's swift thought vibrates throughout this part of the song between his own experience and the general truths exemplified in it. He is too full of his own deliverance to be long silent about it, and, on the other hand, is continually reminded by it of

the wide sweep of the beneficent laws which have been so fruitful of good to him. The most precious result of individual mercy is the vision obtained through it of the universal Lover of souls. "My God" will be widened into "our God," and "our God" will rest upon "my God," if either is spoken from the heart's depths. So in vv. 27–29 the personal element comes again to the front. The individualising name "My God" occurs in each verse, and the deliverance underlying the theophany is described in terms which prepare for the fuller celebration of victory in the last part of the psalm. God lights the psalmist's lamp, by which is meant not the continuance of his family (as the expression elsewhere means), but the preservation of his own life, with the added idea, especially in ver. 28 *b*, of prosperity. Ver. 29 tells how the lamp was kept alight, namely by the singer's victory in actual battle, in which his swift rush had overtaken the enemy, and his agile limbs had scaled their walls. The parallelism of the clauses is made more complete by the emendation adopted by Lagarde, Cheyne, Baethgen, etc, who read ver. 29 *a*, "I [can] break down a fence," but this is unnecessary. The same combination of running and climbing occurs in Joel ii. 7, and the two clauses of ver. 33 seem to repeat those of ver. 29. The swift, agile warrior, then, traces these physical powers to God, as he does more at large in later verses.

Once more, the song passes, in ver. 30, to the wider truths taught by the personal deliverance. "Our God" takes the place of "my God"; and "all who take refuge in Him" are discerned as gathering, a shadowy crowd, round the solitary psalmist, and as sharing in his blessings. The large truths of these verses are the precious fruit of distress and deliverance. Both

have cleared the singer's eyes to see, and tuned his lips to sing, a God whose doings are without a flaw, whose word is like pure gold without alloy or falsehood, whose ample protection shields all who flee to its shelter, who alone is God, the fountain of strength, who stands firm for ever, the inexpugnable defence and dwelling-place of men. This burst of pure adoration echoes the tones of the glorious beginning of the psalm. Happy they who, as the result of life's experience, solve "the riddle of this painful earth," with these firm and jubilant convictions as the very foundation of their being.

The remainder of the psalm (ver. 32 to end) describes the victorious campaign of the psalmist and the establishment of his kingdom. There is difficulty in determining the tenses of the verbs in some verses, and interpreters vary between pasts and futures. The inclination of the greater number of recent commentators is to carry the historical retrospect uninterruptedly through the whole context, which, as Hupfeld acknowledges, "allerdings das bequemste ist," and those who suppose occasional futures interspersed (as the R.V. and Hupfeld) differ in the places of their introduction. "Everything here is retrospective," says Delitzsch, and certainly that view is simplest and gives unity to the whole. The name of God is never mentioned in the entire section, except as vainly invoked by the flying foe. Not till the closing doxologies does it appear again, with the frequency which marks the middle part of the psalm. A similar sparse use of it characterises the description of the theophany. In both cases there is a peculiar force given by the stream of verbs without expressed nominatives. The hurrying clauses here vividly reproduce the haste of battle, and each falls like the blow of a battle mace wielded by a strong arm,

The equipment of the king for the fight (vv. 32–36), the fierce assault, flight of the foe and their utter annihilation (vv. 37–42), the extension by conquest of the singer's kingdom (vv. 43, 44), successively pass before us as we listen to the panting words with the heat of battle in them; and all rises at last into exuberant praise, which re-echoes some strains of the introductory burst of thanksgiving.

Many mythologies have told how the gods arm their champions, but the psalmist reaches a loftier height than these. He ventures to think of God as doing the humble office of bracing on his girdle, but the girdle is itself strength. God, whose own "way is perfect" (ver. 30), makes His servant's "way" in some measure like His own; and though, no doubt, the figure must be interpreted in a manner congruous with its context, as chiefly implying "perfection" in regard to the purpose in hand—namely, warfare—we need not miss the deeper truth that God's soldiers are fitted for conflict by their "ways" being conformed to God's. This man's "strength was as the strength of ten, because his heart was pure." Strength and swiftness are the two characteristics of antique heroes, and God's gift bestowed both on the psalmist. Light of foot as a deer and able to climb to the robber forts perched on crags, as a chamois would, his hands deft, and his muscular arms strong to bend the bow which others could not use, he is the ideal of a warrior of old; and all these natural powers he again ascribes to God's gift. A goddess gave Achilles his wondrous shield, but what was it to that which God binds upon this warrior's arm? As his girdle was strength, and not merely a means of strength, his shield is salvation, and not merely a means of

safety. The fact that God purposes to save and does act for saving is the defence against all dangers and enemies. It is the same deep truth as the prophet expresses by making "salvation" the walls and bulwarks of the strong city where the righteous nation dwells in peace. God does not thus arm His servant and then send him out alone to fight as he can, but "Thy right hand holds me up." What assailant can beat him down, if that hand is under his armpit to support him? The beautiful rendering of the A.V., "Thy gentleness," scarcely conveys the meaning, and weakens the antithesis with the psalmist's "greatness," which is brought out by translating "Thy lowliness," or even more boldly "Thy humility." There is that in God which answers to the peculiarly human virtue of lowliness; and unless there were, man would remain small and unclothed with God-given strength. The devout soul thrills with wonder at God's stooping love, which it discerns to be the foundation of all His gifts and therefore of its blessedness. This singer saw deep into the heart of God, and anticipated the great word of the one Revealer, "I am meek and lowly in heart." But God's care for him does not merely fit him for the fight: it also orders circumstances so as to give him a free course. Having made his "feet like hinds' feet," God then prepares paths that he should walk in them. The work is only half done when the man is endowed for service or conflict; a field for his powers must be forthcoming, and God will take care that no strength given by Him lies idle for want of a wrestling ground. Sooner or later feet find the road.

Then follow six verses (37–42) full of the stir and tumult of battle. There is no necessity for the change to futures in the verbs of vv. 37, 38, which the R.V.

adopts. The whole is a picture of past conflict, for which the psalmist had been equipped by God. It is a literal fight, the triumph of which still glows in the singer's heart and flames in his vivid words. We see him in swift pursuit, pressing hard on the enemy, crushing them with his fierce onset, trampling them under foot. They break and flee, shrieking out prayers, which the pursuer has a stern joy in knowing to be fruitless. His blows fall like those of a great pestle, and crush the fleeing wretches, who are scattered by his irresistible charge, like dust whirled by the storm. The last clause of the picture of the routed foe is better given by the various reading in 2 Samuel, which requires only a very slight alteration in one letter: "I did stamp them as the mire of the streets." Such delight in the enemy's despair and destruction, such gratification at hearing their vain cries to Jehovah, are far away from Christian sentiments; and the gulf is not wholly bridged by the consideration that the psalmist felt himself to be God's anointed, and enmity to him to be treason against God. Most natural as his feelings were, perfectly consistent with the level of religion proper to the then stage of revelation, capable of being purified into that triumph in the victory of good and ruin of evil without which there is no vigorous sympathy with Christ's battle, and kindling as they do by their splendid energy and condensed rapidity an answering glow in even readers so far away from their scene as we are, they are still of "another spirit" from that which Christ has breathed into the Church, and nothing but confusion and mischief can come of slurring over the difference. The light of battle which blazes in them is not the fire which Jesus longed to kindle upon earth.

Thus far the enemies seem to have been native foes rebelling against God's anointed or, if the reference to the Sauline persecution is held by, seeking to prevent his reaching his throne. But, in the concluding verses of this part (43–45), a transition is made to victory over "strangers," *i.e.* foreign nations. "The strivings of the people" seems to point back to the war described already, while "Thou hast made me the head of the nations" refers to external conquests. In 2 Samuel the reading is "my people," which would bring out the domestic reference more strongly; but the suffix for "my" may be a defective form of writing the plural; if so, the peoples in ver. 43 *a* are the "nations" of 43 *b*. In any case the royal singer celebrates the extension of his dominion. The tenses in vv. 44, 45, which the R.V. again gives as futures (as does Hupfeld), are better regarded, like all the others, as pasts. The wider dominion is not inconsistent with Davidic origin, as his conquests were extended beyond the territory of Israel. The picture of the hasty surrender of the enemy at the very sound of the conqueror's name is graphic. "They lied unto me," as the words in ver. 44 *b* are literally, gives forcibly the feigned submission covering bitter hate. "They fade away," as if withered by the simoom, the hot blast of the psalmist's conquering power. "They come trembling [or, as 2 Samuel reads, come limping] from their strongholds.'

Vv. 46 to end make a noble close to a noble hymn, in which the singer's strong wing never flags nor the rush of thought and feeling slackens. Even more absolutely than in the rest of the psalm every victory is ascribed to Jehovah. He alone acts; the psalmist is simply the recipient. To have learned by life's struggles and deliverances that Jehovah is a living God

and "my Rock" is to have gathered life's best fruit. A morning of tempest has cleared into sunny calm, as it always will, if tempest drives to God. He who cries to Jehovah when the floods of destruction make him afraid will in due time have to set to his seal that Jehovah liveth. If we begin with "The Lord is my Rock," we shall end with "Blessed be my Rock." Thankfulness does not weary of reiterating acknowledgments; and so the psalmist gathers up once more the main points of the psalm in these closing strains and lays all his mass of blessings at the feet of the Giver. His deliverance from his domestic foes and his conquests over external enemies are wholly God's work, and therefore supply both impulse and material for praises which shall sound out beyond the limits of Israel. The vow to give thanks among the nations has been thought fatal to the Davidic origin of the psalm. Seeing, however, that some foreign peoples were conquered by him, there was opportunity for its fulfilment. His function to make known the name of Jehovah was the reason for his victories. David had learned the purpose of his elevation, and recognised in an extended kingdom a wider audience for his song. Therefore Paul penetrates to the heart of the psalm when he quotes ver. 49 in Rom. xv. 9 as a proof that the evangelising of the Gentiles was an Old Testament hope. The plain lesson from the psalmist's vow is that God's mercies bind, and if felt aright will joyfully impel, the receiver to spread His name as far as his voice can reach. Love is sometimes silent, but gratitude must speak. The most unmusical voice is tuned to melody by thankfulness, and they need never want a theme who can tell what the Lord has done for their soul.

The last verse of the psalm is sometimes regarded as a liturgical addition, and the mention of David gratuitously supposed to be adverse to his authorship, but there is nothing unnatural in a king's mentioning himself in such a connection nor in the reference to his dynasty, which is evidently based upon the promise of perpetual dominion given through Nathan. The Christian reader knows how much more wonderful than the singer knew was the mercy granted to the king in that great promise, fulfilled in the Son of David, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and who bears God's name to all the nations.

PSALM XIX.

1 The heavens declare the glory of God,
And the work of His hands the firmament makes known.
2 Day to day pours forth speech,
And night to night shows knowledge.
3 There is no speech and no words;
Not heard is their voice.
4 In all the earth their line goes forth, and in the end of the world their words;
For the sun has He set a tent in them,
5 And he is like a bridegroom going out from his chamber;
He rejoices like a hero to run (his) course.
6 From the end of the heavens is his going forth, and his circuit unto their ends;
And nothing is hid from his heat.

7 The law of Jehovah is perfect, restoring the soul;
The testimony of Jehovah is trusty, making wise the simple.
8 The precepts of Jehovah are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of Jehovah is pure, enlightening the eyes.
9 The fear of Jehovah is clean, standing for ever;
The judgments of Jehovah are truth: they are righteous altogether.
10 They are more to be desired than gold and than abundant [gold] refined,
And they are sweeter than honey and the droppings of the honeycomb.

11 Moreover, Thy servant is warned by them;
In keeping them is reward abundant.
12 Inadvertencies who can discern?
From hidden sins absolve me.
13 Also from presumptuous [sins] keep back Thy servant: let them not rule over me;
Then shall I be guiltless, and I shall be absolved from great transgression.

14 Accepted be the words of my mouth and meditation of my heart
in Thy sight,
Jehovah, my Rock and my Kinsman-redeemer!

IS this originally one psalm or bits of two, pieced together to suggest a comparison between the two sources of knowledge of God, which the authors did not dream of? The affirmative is strongly *main*tained, but, we may venture to say, not so strongly *sus*tained. The two parts are said to differ in style, rhythm, and subject. Certainly they do, but the difference in style accounts for the difference in structure. It is not an unheard-of phenomenon that cadence should change with theme; and if the very purpose of the song is to set forth the difference of the two witnesses to God, nothing can be more likely than such a change in measure. The two halves are said to be put together abruptly without anything to smooth the transition. So they are, and so is ver. 4 put by the side of ver. 3; and so does the last turn of thought (vv. 12–14) follow the second. Cyclopean architecture without mortar has a certain impressiveness. The abruptness is rather an argument for than against the original unity, for a compiler would have been likely to try to make some sort of glue to hold his two fragments together, while a poet, in the rush of his afflatus, would welcome the very abruptness which the manufacturer would avoid. Surely the thought that binds the whole into a unity—that *Jehovah* is *El*, and that nature and law witness to the same Divine Person, though with varying clearness—is not so strange as that we should have to find its author in some late editor unknown.

Vv. 1–6 hymn the silent declaration by the heavens. The details of exposition must first be dealt with. "Declare" and "makes known" are participles, and thus

express the continuity of the acts. The substance of the witness is set forth with distinct reference to its limitations, for "glory" has here no moral element, but simply means what Paul calls "eternal power and Godhead," while the Divine name of God ("El") is used in intended contrast to "Jehovah" in the second half, a *nuance* which must be obliterated if this is a conglomerate psalm. "His handiwork," in like manner, limits the revelation. The heavens by day are so marvellously unlike the heavens by night that the psalmist's imagination conjures up two long processions, each member of which passes on the word entrusted to him to his successor—the blazing days with heaven naked but for one great light, and the still nights with all their stars. Ver. 3 has given commentators much trouble in attempting to smooth its paradox. Tastes are curiously different, for some critics think that the familiar interpretation gives a flat, prosaic meaning, while Cheyne takes the verse to be a gloss for dull readers, and exclaims, "How much the brilliant psalm fragment gains by its omission!" *De gustibus*, etc. Some of us may still feel that the psalmist's contrast of the awful silence in the depths of the sky and of the voice that speaks to opened ears thrills us with something very like the electric touch of poetry. In ver. 4 the thought of the great voices returns. "Their line" is usually explained as meaning their sphere of influence, marked out, as it were, by a measuring cord. If that rendering is adopted, ver. 4 *b* would in effect say, "Their words go as far as their realm." Or the rendering "sound" may be deduced, though somewhat precariously, from that of *line*, since a line stretched is musical. But the word is not used as meaning the string of an instrument, and the very slight conjectural

emendation which gives "voice" instead of "line" has much to recommend it. In any case the teaching of the verse is plain from the last clause, namely the universality of the revelation. It is singular that the mention of the sun should come in the close of the verse; and there may be some error in the text, though the introduction of the sun here may be explained as completing the picture of the heavens, of which it is the crowning glory. Then follows the fuller delineation of his joyous energy, of his swift strength in his course, of his penetrating beams, illuminating and warming all. Why should the glowing metaphors, so natural and vigorous, of the sun coming forth from his bridal chamber and, hero-like, running his race, be taken to be traces of ancient myths now innocently reclaimed from the service of superstition? To find in these two images a proof that the first part of the psalm belongs to the post-exilic "literary revival of Hebrew mythology" is surely to lay more on them than they can bear.

The scientific contemplation of nature is wholly absent from Scripture, and the picturesque is very rare. This psalmist knew nothing about solar spectra or stellar distances, but he heard a voice from out of the else waste heavens which sounded to him as if it named God. Comte ventured to say that the heavens declare the glory of the astronomer, not of God; but, if there be an order in them, which it is a man's glory to discover, must there not be a mind behind the order, and must not the Maker have more glory than the investigator? The psalmist is protesting against stellar worship, which some of his neighbours practised. The sun was a creature, not a god; his "race" was marked out by the same hand which in depths beyond the visible heavens had pitched a "tent" for his nightly

rest. We smile at the simple astronomy; the religious depth is as deep as ever. Dull ears do not hear these voices; but whether they are stopped with the clay of earthly tastes and occupations, or stuffed with scientific wadding of the most modern kind, the ears that do not hear God's name sounded from the abysses above, have failed to hear the only word which can make man feel at home in nature. Carlyle said that the sky was "a sad sicht." The sadness and awfulness are taken away when we hear the heavens telling the glory of God. The unscientific psalmist who did hear them was nearer the very heart of the mystery than the scientist who knows everything else about them but that.

With an abrupt transition which is full of poetical force, the singer turns to the praises of the better revelation of Jehovah. Nature speaks in eloquent silence of the strong God, but has no witness to His righteous will for men or His love to them which can compare with the clear utterances of His law. The rhythm changes, and in its cadence expresses the psalmist's exuberant delight in that law. In vv. 7–11 the clauses are constructed on a uniform plan, each containing a name for the law, an attribute of it, and one of its effects. The abundance of synonyms indicates familiarity and clear views of the many sides of the subject. The psalmist had often brooded on the thought of what that law was, because, loving its Giver, he must needs love the gift. So he calls it "law," or teaching, since there he found the best lessons for character and life. It was "testimony," for in it God witnessed what He is and what we should be, and so witnessed against sin; it was a body of "precepts" (statutes, A.V.) giving rich variety of directions; it was "commandment," blessedly imperative; it was "fear of

the Lord," the effect being put for the cause; it was "judgments," the decisions of infinite truth concerning duty.

These synonyms have each an attribute attached, which, together, give a grand aggregate of qualities discerned by a devout heart to inhere in that law which is to so many but a restraint and a foe. It is "perfect," as containing without flaw or defect the ideal of conduct; "sure" or reliable, as worthy of being absolutely followed and certain to be completely fulfilled; "right," as prescribing the straight road to man's true goal; "pure" or bright, as being light like the sun, but of a higher quality than that material brilliance; "clean," as contrasted with the foulness bedaubing false faiths and making idol worship unutterably loathsome; "true" and "wholly righteous," as corresponding accurately to the mind of Jehovah and the facts of humanity and as being in full accordance with the justice which has its seat in the bosom of God.

The effects are summed up in the latter clauses of these verses, which stand, as it were, a little apart, and by the slight pause are made more emphatic. The rhythm rises and falls like the upspringing and sinking of a fountain. The law "restores the soul," or rather refreshes the life, as food does; it "makes the simple wise" by its sure testimony, giving practical guidance to narrow understandings and wills open to easy beguiling by sin; it "rejoices the heart," since there is no gladness equal to that of knowing and doing the will of God; it "enlightens the eyes" with brightness beyond that of the created light which rules the day. Then the relation of clauses changes slightly in ver. 9, and a second attribute takes the place of the effect. It "endures for ever," and, as we have seen, is "wholly

righteous." The Old Testament law was relatively imperfect and destined to be done away, but the moral core of it abides. Being more valuable than all other treasures, there is wealth in the very desire after it more than in possessing these. Loved, it yields sweetness in comparison with which the delights of sense are bitter; done, it automatically rewards the doer. If obedience had no results except its inward consequences, it would be abundantly repaid. Every true servant of Jehovah will be willing to be warned by that voice, even though it rebuke and threaten.

All this rapture of delight in the law contrasts with the impatience and dislike which some men entertain for it. To the disobedient that law spoils their coarse gratifications. It is as a prison in which life is wearisomely barred from delights; but they who dwell behind its fences know that these keep evils off, and that within are calm joys and pure pleasures.

The contemplation of the law cannot but lead to self-examination, and that to petition. So the psalmist passes into prayer. His shortcomings appal, for "by the law is the knowledge of sin," and he feels that beyond the sin which he knows, there is a dark region in him where foul things nestle and breed fast. "Secret faults" are those hidden, not from men, but from himself. He discovers that he has hitherto undiscovered sins. Lurking evils are most dangerous because, like aphides on the under-side of a rose leaf, they multiply so quickly unobserved; small deeds make up life, and small, unnoticed sins darken the soul. Mud in water, at the rate of a grain to a glassful, will make a lake opaque. "Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth." Conscience needs educating; and we have to compare ourselves with the

ideal of perfect life in Jesus, if we would know our faults, as young artists go over their copies in front of the masterpiece. But the psalmist knows that, servant of God though he is, he is in danger from another class of sins, and so prays to be held back from "presumptuous sins," *i.e.* wilful conscious transgressions. Such deliberate contraventions of law tend to become habitual and despotic; so the prayer follows that they may not "have dominion." But even that is not the lowest depth. Deliberate sin, which has gained the upper hand, is but too apt to end in apostacy. "Great transgression" is probably a designation for casting off the very pretence of worshipping Jehovah. That is the story of many a fall. First, some unsuspected evil habit gnaws away the substance of the life, as white ants do wood, leaving the shell apparently intact; then come sins open and palpable, and these enslave the will, becoming habits, and then follows entire abandonment of the profession of religion. It is a slippery, dark stairway, and the only safety is in not setting foot on the top step. God, and God only, can "keep us back." He will, if we cling to Him, knowing our weakness. Thus clinging, we may unblamed cherish the daring hope that we shall be "upright and innocent," since nothing less than entire deliverance from sin in all its forms and issues can correspond to the will of God concerning us and the power of God in us, nor satisfy our deepest desires.

The closing aspiration is that Jehovah would accept the song and prayer. There is an allusion to the acceptance of a sacrifice, for the phrase "be acceptable" is frequent in connection with the sacrificial ritual. When the words of the mouth coincide with the meditation of the heart, we may hope that prayers for cleansing

from, and defence against, sin, offered to Him whom our faith recognises as our "strength" and our "Redeemer," will be as a sacrifice of a sweet smell, well-pleasing to God. He best loves the law of Jehovah who lets it teach him his sin, and send him to his knees; he best appreciates the glories of the silent heavens who knows that their witness to God is but the prelude of the deeper music of the Scriptures' declaration of the heart and will of Jehovah, and who grasps Him as his "strength and his Redeemer" from all evil, whether evil of sin or evil of sorrow.

PSALM XX.

1 Jehovah answer thee in the day of trouble,
The name of the God of Jacob set thee on high;
2 Send thy help from the holy place,
And from Zion hold thee up;
3 Remember all thy meal offerings,
And thy burnt offerings may He find fat; Selah.
4 Give thee according to thy heart,
And all thy counsel may He fulfil.

5 May we exult in thy salvation, and in the name of our God wave our standards;
Jehovah fulfil all thy petitions!

6 Now I know that Jehovah saves His anointed;
He will answer him from his Holy heaven, with mighty deeds of the salvation of His right hand.

7 These boast in chariots, and these in horses;
And we—in the name of Jehovah our God we boast.
8 They—they are bowed down, and fall;
And we—we are risen, and stand firm.
9 Jehovah, save!
May the King hear us in the day when we call.

THIS is a battle song, followed by a chant of victory. They are connected in subject and probably in occasion, but fight and triumph have fallen dim to us, though we can still feel how hotly the fire once glowed. The passion of loyalty and love for the king, expressed in these psalms, fits no reign in Judah so well as the bright noonday of David's, when "whatever the king did pleased all the people." Cheyne, indeed, would bring them down to the Maccabean

period, and suggests Simon Maccabæus as the ruler referred to. He has to put a little gentle pressure on "king" to contract it to fit the man of his choice, and appeals to the "good old Semitic sense" of "consul." But would not an appeal to Hebrew usage have been more satisfactory? If "king" means "king," great or small, the psalm is not post-exilic, and the Davidic date will not seem impossible. It does not seem impossible that a poet-king should have composed a national hymn praying for his own victory, which was the nation's also.

The psalm has traces of the alternation of chorus and solo. The nation or army first pours out its united prayer for victory in vv. 1–5, and is succeeded by a single voice (possibly that of the officiating priest or the king himself) in ver. 6, expressing confidence that the prayer is answered, which, again, is followed by the closing chorus of many voices throbbing with the assurance of victory before a blow is struck, and sending one more long-drawn cry to God ere battle is joined.

The prayer in vv. 1–5 breathes self-distrust and confidence in Jehovah, the temper which brings victory, not only to Israel, but to all fighters for God. Here is no boasting of former victories, nor of man's bravery and strength, nor of a captain's skill. One name is invoked. It alone rouses courage and pledges triumph. "The name of the God of Jacob set thee on high." That name is almost regarded as a person, as is often the case. Attributes and acts are ascribed to it which properly belong to the Unnameable whom it names, as if with some dim inkling that the agent of revealing a person must be a person. The name is the revealed character, which is contemplated as having existence in

some sense apart from Him whose character it is. Possibly there is a reference to Gen. xxxv. 3, where Jacob speaks of "the God who answered me in the day of my distress." That ancient instance of His power to hear and help may have floated before the singer's mind as heartening faith for this day of battle. To "set on high" is a familiar natural figure for deliverance. The earthly sanctuary is Jehovah's throne; and all real help must come thence, of which help His dwelling there is a pledge. So in these two verses the extremity of need, the history of past revelation, and the special relation of Jehovah to Israel are woven into the people's prayer for their king. In vv. 3, 4, they add the incense of their intercession to his sacrifices. The background of the psalm is probably the altar on which the accustomed offerings before a battle were being presented (1 Sam. xiii. 9). The prayer for acceptance of the burnt offering is very graphic, since the word rendered "accept" is literally "esteem fat."

One wish moved the sacrificing king and the praying people. Their common desire was victory, but the people are content to be obscure, and their loyal love so clings to their monarch and leader that they only wish the fulfilment of his wishes. This unity of feeling culminates in the closing petitions in ver. 6, where self-oblivion wishes "May we exult in thy salvation," arrogating none of the glory of victory to themselves, but ascribing all to him, and vows "In the name of our God we will wave our standards," ascribing victory to Him, its ultimate cause. An army that prays, "Jehovah fulfil all thy petitions," will be ready to obey all its captain's commands and to move in obedience to his impulse as if it were part of himself. The enthusiastic community of purpose with its chief and absolute

reliance on Jehovah, with which this prayer throbs, would go far towards securing victory anywhere. They should find their highest exemplification in that union between Christ and us in which all human relationships find theirs, since, in the deepest sense, they are all Messianic prophecies, and point to Him who is all the good that other men and women have partially been, and satisfies all the cravings and necessities which human relationships, however blessed, but incompletely supply.

The sacrifice has been offered; the choral prayer has gone up. Silence follows, the worshippers watching the curling smoke as it rises; and then a single voice breaks out into a burst of glad assurance that sacrifice and prayer are answered. Who speaks? The most natural answer is, "The king"; and the fact that he speaks of himself as Jehovah's anointed in the third person does not present a difficulty. What is the reference in that "now" at the beginning of ver. 6? May we venture to suppose that the king's heart swelled at the exhibition of his subjects' devotion and hailed it as a pledge of victory? The future is brought into the present by the outstretched hand of faith, for this single speaker knows that "Jehovah has saved," though no blow has yet been struck. The prayer had asked for help from Zion; the anticipation of answer looks higher: to the holier sanctuary, where Jehovah indeed dwells. The answer now waited for in sure confidence is "the mighty deeds of salvation of His right hand," some signal forthputting of Divine power scattering the foe. A whisper may start an avalanche. The prayer of the people has set Omnipotence in motion. Such assurance that petitions are heard is wont to spring in the heart that truly prays, and comes as a

forerunner of fulfilment, shedding on the soul the dawn of the yet unrisen sun. He has but half prayed who does not wait in silence, watching the flight of his arrow and not content to cease till the calm certainty that it has reached its aim fills his heart.

Again the many voices take up the song, responding to the confidence of the single speaker and, like him, treating the victory as already won. Looking across the field to the masses of the enemy's cavalry and chariots, forces forbidden to Israel, though employed by them in later days, the song grandly opposes to these "the name of Jehovah our God." There is a world of contempt and confidence in the juxtaposition. Chariots and horses are very terrible, especially to raw soldiers unaccustomed to their whirling onset; but the Name is mightier, as Pharaoh and his array proved by the Red Sea. This reference to the army of Israel as unequipped with cavalry and chariots is in favour of an early date, since the importation and use of both began as soon as Solomon's time. The certain issue of the fight is given in ver. 8 in a picturesque fashion, made more vigorous by the tenses which describe completed acts. When the brief struggle is over, this is what will be seen—the enemy prone, Israel risen from subjection and standing firm. Then comes a closing cry for help, which, according to the traditional division of the verse, has one very short clause and one long drawn out, like the blast of the trumpet sounding the charge. The intensity of appeal is condensed in the former clause into the one word "save" and the renewed utterance of the name, thrice referred to in this short psalm as the source at once of strength and confidence. The latter clause, as in the A.V. and R.V., transfers the title of King from the

earthly shadow to the true Monarch in the heavens, and thereby suggests yet another plea for help. The other division of the verse, adopted in the LXX. and by some moderns, equalises the clauses by transferring "the king" to the former ("O Lord, save the king, and answer us," etc.). But this involves a violent change from the second person imperfect in the first clause to the third person imperfect in the second. It would be intolerably clumsy to say, "Do Thou save; may He hear," and therefore the LXX. has had recourse to inserting "and" at the beginning of the second clause, which somewhat breaks the jolt, but is not in the Hebrew. The text, as it stands, yields a striking meaning, beautifully suggesting the subordinate office of the earthly monarch and appealing to the true King to defend His own army and go forth with it to the battle which is waged for His name. When we are sure that we are serving Jehovah and fighting for Him, we may be sure that we go not a warfare at our own charges nor alone.

PSALM XXI.

1 Jehovah, in Thy strength the king rejoices,
And in Thy salvation how greatly he exults!
2 The desire of his heart Thou hast given to him,
And the request of his lips Thou hast not refused.
3 For Thou meetest him with blessings of good;
Thou settest on his head a crown of pure gold.
4 Life he asked from Thee; Thou gavest it to him,
Length of days for ever and ever.
5 Great is his glory through Thy salvation;
Honour and majesty Thou layest upon him.
6 For Thou dost set him [to be] blessings for ever,
Dost gladden him in joy with Thy face.
7 For the king trusts in Jehovah,
And in the loving-kindness of the Most High he shall not be moved.

8 Thine hand shall reach towards all thy foes;
Thy right hand shall reach all thy haters.
9 Thou shalt make them as a furnace of fire at the time of thine appearance (face);
Jehovah in His wrath shall swallow them up: fire shall devour [them.
10 Their fruit shalt thou destroy from the earth,
And their seed from the sons of men.
11 For they cause evil to hang over thee;
They meditate mischief: they will achieve nothing.
12 For thou shalt make them turn their back,
On thy bowstrings wilt aim [arrows] at their faces.

13 Lift Thyself up, Jehovah, in Thy strength;
We will sing and harp, [praising] Thy might.

THIS psalm is a pendant to the preceding. There the people prayed for the king; here they give thanks for him: there they asked that his desires might

be fulfilled; here they bless Jehovah, who has fulfilled them: there the battle was impending; here it has been won, though foes are still in the field: there the victory was prayed for; here it is prophesied. Who is the "king"? The superscription points to David. Conjecture has referred to Hezekiah, principally because of his miraculous recovery, which is supposed to be intended in ver. 4. Cheyne thinks of Simon Maccabæus, and sees his priestly crown in ver. 3. But there are no individualising features in the royal portrait, and it is so idealised, or rather spiritualised, that it is hard to suppose that any single monarch was before the singer's mind. The remarkable greatness and majesty of the figure will appear as we read. The whole may be cast into two parts, with a closing strain of prayer. In the first part (vv. 1–7) the people praise Jehovah for His gifts to the king; in the second (vv. 8–12) they prophesy to the king complete victory; in ver. 13 they end, as in xx., with a short petition, which, however, here is, in accordance with the tone of the whole, more jubilant than the former and less shrill.

The former psalm had asked for strength to be given to the king; this begins with thanks for the strength in which the king rejoices. In the former the people had anticipated triumph in the king's salvation or victory; here they celebrate his exceeding exultation in it. It was his, since he was victor, but it was Jehovah's, since He was Giver of victory. Loyal subjects share in the king's triumph, and connect it with him; but he himself traces it to God. The extraordinarily lofty language in which Jehovah's gifts are described in the subsequent verses has, no doubt, analogies in the Assyrian hymns to which Cheyne

refers; but the abject reverence and partial deification which these breathe were foreign to the relations of Israel to its kings, who were not separated from their subjects by such a gulf as divided the great sovereigns of the East from theirs. The mysterious Divinity which hedges "the king" in the royal psalms is in sharp contrast with the democratic familiarity between prince and people exhibited in the history. The phenomena common to these psalms naturally suggest that "the king" whom they celebrate is rather the ideal than the real monarch. The office rather than the individual who partially fulfils its demands and possesses its endowments seems to fill the singer's canvas. But the ideal of the office is destined to be realised in the Messiah, and the psalm is in a true sense Messianic, inasmuch as, with whatever mixture of conceptions proper to the then stage of revelation, it still ascribes to the ideal king attributes which no king of Judah exhibited. The transcendant character of the gifts of Jehovah enumerated here is obvious, however the language may be pared down. First, we have the striking picture of Jehovah coming forth to meet the conqueror with "blessings of goodness," as Melchizedek met Abraham with refreshments in his hands and benedictions on his lips. Victory is naturally followed by repose and enjoyment, and all are Jehovah's gift. The subsequent endowments may possibly be regarded as the details of these blessings, the fruits of the victory. Of these the first is the coronation of the conqueror, not as if he had not been king before, but as now more fully recognised as such. The supporters of the Davidic authorship refer to the crown of gold won at the capture of Rabbath of Ammon, but there is no need to seek historical basis

for the representation. Then comes a signal instance of the king's closeness of intercourse with Jehovah and of his receiving his heart's desire in that he asked for "life" and received "length of days for ever and ever." No doubt the strong expression for perpetuity may be paralleled in such phrases as "O king, live for ever," and others which are obviously hyperbolical and mean not perpetual, but indefinitely protracted, duration; but the great emphasis of expression here and its repetition in ver. 6 can scarcely be disposed of as mere hyperbole. If it is the ideal king who is meant, his undying life is substantially synonymous with the continuance of the dynasty which 2 Sam. vii. represents as the promise underlying the Davidic throne. The figure of the king is then brought still nearer to the light of Jehovah, and words which are consecrated to express Divine attributes are applied to him in ver. 5. "Glory," "honour and majesty," are predicated of him, not as if there were an apotheosis, as would have been possible in Assyrian or Roman flattery, but the royal recipient and the Divine Giver are clearly separated, even while the lustre raying from Jehovah is conceived of as falling in brightness upon the king. These flashing emanations of the Divine glory make their recipient "blessings for ever," which seems to include both the possession and the communication of good. An eternal fountain of blessing and himself blessed, he is cheered with joy which comes from Jehovah's face, so close is his approach and so gracious to him is that countenance. Nothing higher could be thought of than such intimacy and friendliness of access. To dwell in the blaze of that face and to find only joy therein is the crown of human blessedness (Psalm xvi. 11). Finally, the double foundation of all the king's gifts is laid in

ver. 7: he trusts and Jehovah's loving-kindness gives, and therefore he stands firm, and his throne endures, whatever may dash against it. These daring anticipations are too exuberant to be realised in any but One, whose victory was achieved in the hour of apparent defeat; whose conquest was both His salvation and God's; who prays knowing that He is always heard; who is King of men because He endured the cross,—and wears the crown of pure gold because He did not refuse the crown of thorns; who liveth for evermore, having been given by the Father to have life in Himself; who is the outshining of the Father's glory, and has all power granted unto Him; who is the source of all blessing to all, who dwells in the joy to which He will welcome His servants; and who Himself lived and conquered by the life of faith, and so became the first Leader of the long line of those who have trusted and therefore have stood fast. Whomsoever the psalmist saw in his vision, he has gathered into one many traits which are realised only in Jesus Christ.

The second part (vv. 8–12) is, by Hupfeld and others, taken as addressed to Jehovah; and that idea has much to recommend it, but it seems to go to wreck on the separate reference to Jehovah in ver. 9, on the harshness of applying "evil against thee" and "a mischievous device" (ver. 11) to Him, and on the absence of a sufficient link of connection between the parts if it is adopted. If, on the other hand, we suppose that the king is addressed in these verses, there is the same dramatic structure as in Psalm xx.; and the victory which has been won is now taken as a pledge of future ones. The expectation is couched in terms adapted to the horizon of the singer, and on his lips probably meant stern extermination of hostile

nations. The picture is that of a fierce conqueror, and we must not seek to soften the features, nor, on the other hand, to deny the prophetic inspiration of the psalmist. The task of the ideal king was to crush and root out opposition to his monarchy, which was Jehovah's. Very terrible are the judgments of his hand, which sound liker those of Jehovah than those inflicted by a man, as Hupfeld and others have felt. In ver. 8 the construction is slightly varied in the two clauses, the verb "reach" having a preposition attached in the former, and not in the latter, which difference may be reproduced by the distinction between "reach towards" and "reach." The seeking hand is stretched out after, and then it grasps, its victims. The comparison of the "fiery oven" is inexact in form, but the very negligence helps the impression of agitation and terribleness. The enemy are not likened to a furnace, but to the fuel cast into it. But the phrase rendered in A.V. "in the time of thine anger" is very remarkable, being literally "in the time of thy face." The destructive effect of Jehovah's countenance (xxxiv. 17) is here transferred to His king's, into whose face has passed, as he gazed in joy on the face of Jehovah, some of the lustre which kills where it does not gladden. Compare "everlasting destruction from the face of the Lord" (2 Thess. i. 9). The king is so completely representative of Jehovah that the destruction of the enemy is the work of the one fire of wrath common to both. The destruction extends to the whole generation of enemies, as in the ferocious warfare of old days, when a nation was wiped off the earth. The psalmist sees in the extremest vengeance the righteous and inevitable consequence of hostility condemned by the nature of the case to be futile, and yet criminal: "They cause

evil to hang over thee: they meditate mischief; they will achieve nothing." Then, in ver. 12, the dread scene is completed by the picture of the flying foe and the overtaking pursuer, who first puts them to flight, and then, getting in front of them, sends his arrows full in their faces. The ideal of the king has a side of terror; and while his chosen weapon is patient love, he has other arrows in his quiver. The pictures of the destroying conqueror are taken up and surpassed in the New Testament. They do not see the whole Christ who do not see the Warrior Christ, nor have they realised all His work who slur over the solemn expectation that one day men shall call on rocks and hills to cover them from "the steady whole of the Judge's face."

As in Psalm xx., the close is a brief petition, which asks the fulfilment of the anticipations in vv. 8–12, and traces, as in ver. 1, the king's triumph to Jehovah's strength. The loyal love of the nation will take its monarch's victory as its own joy, and be glad in the manifestation thereby of Jehovah's power. That is the true voice of devotion which recognises God, not man, in all victories, and answers the forthflashing of His delivering power by the thunder of praise.

PSALM XXII

1 My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?
[Why art Thou] afar from my help, from the words of my roar?
2 My God, I cry to Thee by day, and Thou answerest not;
And by night, but there is no rest for me.

3 Yet Thou art Holy,
Throned upon the praises of Israel.
4 In Thee our fathers trusted;
They trusted and Thou deliveredst them.
5 To Thee they cried and were delivered;
In Thee they trusted and were not put to shame.

6 But I am a worm, and not a man;
A reproach of men and despised of people.
7 All who see me mock at me;
They draw open the lips, they nod the head.
8 "Roll [thy cares] on Jehovah—let Him deliver him;
Let Him rescue him, for He delights in him."

9 Yea, Thou art He who didst draw me from the womb,
Didst make me trust when on my mother's breasts.
10 Upon Thee was I thrown from birth;
From my mother's womb art Thou my God.
11 Be not far from me, for trouble is near;
For there is no helper.

12 Many bulls have surrounded me,
Strong ones of Bashan have encircled me.
13 They gape upon me with their mouth,
[Like] a lion tearing and roaring.

14 Like water I am poured out,
And all my bones are out of joint
My heart has become like wax,
Melted in the midst of my bowels.

15 My strength (palate ?) is dried up like a potsherd,
And my tongue cleaves to my gums,
And Thou layest me in the dust of death.

16 For dogs have surrounded me,
A pack of evil-doers closed round me,
They pierced my hands and my feet.
17 I can count all my bones,
These—they gaze, upon me they look.
18 They divide my garments among them,
And on my vesture they cast lots.

19 But Thou, Jehovah, be not far off;
My Strength, haste to my help.
20 Deliver my soul from the sword,
My only [life] from the paw of the dog.
21 Save me from the mouth of the lion,
And from the horns of the wild oxen—Thou hast answered me.

22 I will declare Thy name to my brethren,
In the midst of the congregation will I praise Thee.
23 Ye that fear Jehovah, praise Him,
All ye the seed of Jacob, glorify Him,
And stand in awe of Him, all ye the seed of Israel.
24 For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted one.
And has not hid His face from him,
And when he cried has hearkened to him.
25 From Thee [comes] my praise in the great congregation;
My vows will I pay before them that fear Him.
26 The humble shall eat and be satisfied,
They shall praise Jehovah that seek Him;
Let your heart live for ever.

27 All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to Jehovah.
And all the families of the nations shall bow before Thee.
28 For the kingdom is Jehovah's;
And He is ruler among the nations.
29 All the fat ones of the earth eat and bow down;
Before His face kneel all they who were going down to the dust,
And he [who] could not keep his soul alive.

30 A seed shall serve Him;
And it shall be told of Jehovah unto the [next] generation.
31 They shall come and declare His righteousness
Unto a people that shall be born, that He has done [this].

WHO is the sufferer whose wail is the very voice of desolation and despair, and who yet dares to believe that the tale of his sorrow will be a gospel for the world? The usual answers are given. The title ascribes the authorship to David, and is accepted by Delitzsch and others. Hengstenberg and his followers see in the picture the ideal righteous man. Others think of Hezekiah, or Jeremiah, with whose prophecies and history there are many points of connection. The most recent critics find here "the personalised Genius of Israel, or more precisely the followers of Nehemiah, including the large-hearted psalmist" (Cheyne, "Orig. of Psalt.," 264). On any theory of authorship, the startling correspondence of the details of the psalmist's sufferings with those of the Crucifixion has to be accounted for. How startling that correspondence is, both in the number and minuteness of its points, need not be insisted on. Not only does our Lord quote the first verse on the cross, and so show that the psalm was in his heart then, but the gestures and words of mockery were verbally reproduced, as Luke significantly indicates by using the LXX's word for "laugh to scorn" (ver. 7). Christ's thirst is regarded by John as the fulfilment of "scripture," which can scarcely be other than ver. 15. The physical effects of crucifixion are described in the ghastly picture of vv. 14, 15. Whatever difficulty exists in determining the true reading and meaning of the allusion to "my hands and my feet," some violence or indignity to them is intended. The peculiar detail

of dividing the raiment was more than fulfilled, since the apparently parallel and synonymous clauses were resolved into two distinct acts. The recognition of these points in the psalm as prophecies is one thing; the determination of their relation to the psalmist's own experience is quite another. It is taken for granted in many quarters that every such detail in prophecy must describe the writer's own circumstances, and the supposition that they may transcend these is said to be "psychologically impossible." But it is somewhat hazardous for those who have not been subjects of prophetic inspiration to lay down canons of what is possible and impossible in it, and there are examples enough to prove that the relation of the prophets' speech to their consciousness and circumstances was singularly complex, and not to be unravelled by any such *obiter dicta* as to psychological possibilities. They were recipients of messages, and did not always understand what the "Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify." Theories which neglect that aspect of the case do not front all the facts. Certainty as to the authorship of this psalm is probably unattainable. How far its words fitted the condition of the singer must therefore remain unsettled. But that these minute and numerous correspondences are more than coincidences, it seems perverse to deny. The present writer, for one, sees shining through the shadowy personality of the psalmist the figure of the Prince of Sufferers, and believes that whether the former's plaints applied in all their particulars to him, or whether there is in them a certain "element of hyperbole" which becomes simple fact in Jesus' sufferings, the psalm is a prophecy of Him and them. In the former case the psalmist's experience, in the latter case his utterances,

were divinely shaped so as to prefigure the sacred sorrows of the Man of Sorrows.

To a reader who shares in this understanding of the psalm, it must be holy ground, to be trodden reverently and with thoughts adoringly fixed on Jesus. Cold analysis is out of place. And yet there is a distinct order even in the groans, and a manifest contrast in the two halves of the psalm (vv. 1–21 and 22–31). "Thou answerest not" is the key-note of the former; "Thou hast answered me," of the latter. The one paints the sufferings, the other the glory that should follow. Both point to Jesus: the former by the desolation which it breathes; the latter by the world-wide consequences of these solitary sufferings which it foresees.

Surely opposites were never more startlingly blended in one gush of feeling than in that plaint of mingled faith and despair, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" which by its thus addressing God clings fast to Him, and by its wondering question discloses the dreary consciousness of separation from Him. The evidence to the psalmist that he was forsaken was the apparent rejection of his prayers for deliverance; and if David be the speaker, we may suppose that the pathetic fate of his predecessor hovered before his thoughts: "I am sore distressed. . . God is departed from me and answereth me no more." But, while lower degrees of this conflict of trust and despair belong to all deep religious life, and are experienced by saintly sufferers in all ages, the voice that rang through the darkness on Calvary was the cry of Him who experienced its force in supreme measure and in altogether unique manner. None but He can ask that question "Why?" with conscience

void of offence. None but He have known the mortal agony of utter separation from God. None but He have clung to God with absolute trust even in the horror of great darkness. In Christ's consciousness of being forsaken by God lie elements peculiar to it alone, for the separating agent was the gathered sins of the whole world, laid on Him and accepted by Him in the perfection of His loving identification of Himself with men. Unless in that dread hour He was bearing a world's sin, there is no worthy explanation of His cry, and many a silent martyr has faced death for Him with more courage derived from Him than He manifested on His cross.

After the introductory strophe of two verses, there come seven strophes, of which three contain 3 verses each (vv. 3–11) followed by two of 2 verses each (vv. 12–15) and these again by two with 3 verses each. Can a soul agitated as this singer's was regulate its sobs thus? Yes, if it is a singer's, and still more if it is a saint's. The fetters make the limbs move less violently, and there is soothing in the ordered expression of disordered emotion. The form is artistic not artificial; and objections to the reality of the feelings on the ground of the regularity of the form ignore the witness of the masterpieces of literature in all tongues.

The desolation rising from unanswered prayer drives to the contemplation of God's holiness and past responses to trusting men, which are in one aspect an aggravation and in another an alleviation. The psalmist partly answers his own question "Why?" and preaches to Himself that the reason cannot be in Jehovah, whose character and former deeds bind Him to answer trust by help. God's holiness is primarily His separation from, by elevation above, the creature,

both in regard of His freedom from limitations and of His perfect purity. If He is thus "holy," He will not break His promise, nor change His ways with those who trust. It takes some energy of faith to believe that a silent and apparently deaf God is "holy," and the effect of the belief may either be to crush or to lift the spirit. Its first result with this psalmist seems to have been to crush, as the next strophe shows; but the more blessed consequence is won before the end. Here it is partly a plea urged with God, as is that beautiful bold image of God enthroned "on the praises of Israel." These praises are evoked by former acts of grace answering prayers, and of them is built a yet nobler throne than the outstretched wings of the Cherubim. The daring metaphor penetrates deeply into God's delight in men's praise, and the power of Israel's voice to exalt Him in the world. How could a God thus throned cease to give mercies like those which were perpetually commemorated thereby? The same half-wistful, half-confident retrospect is continued in the remaining verses of this strophe (vv. 4, 5), which look back to the "grey fathers'" experience. Mark the plaintive reiteration of "trust" and "deliver," the two inseparables, as the days of old attested, which had now become so sadly parted. Not more certainly the flow of water in a pipe answers the application of thirsty lips to its opening than did God's rescuing act respond to the father's trust. And now!—

The use of "Our" in reference to the fathers has been laid hold of as favouring the hypothesis that the speaker is the personified nation; but no individual member of a nation would speak of the common ancestors as "My fathers." That would mean his own family progenitors, whereas the psalmist means the

Patriarchs and the earlier generations. No argument for the national theory, then, can be drawn from the phrase. Can the reference to Jesus be carried into this strophe? Assuredly it may, and it shows us how truly He associated Himself with His nation, and fed His faith by the records of the past. "He also is a son of Abraham."

Such remembrances make the contrast of present sufferings and of a far-off God more bitter; and so a fresh wave of agony rolls over the psalmist's soul. He feels himself crushed and as incapable of resistance as a worm bruised in all its soft length by an armed heel. The very semblance of manhood has faded. One can scarcely fail to recall "his visage was so marred more than any man" (Isa. lii. 14), and the designation of Jehovah's servant Israel as "thou worm" (Isa. xli. 14). The taunts that wounded the psalmist so sorely have long since fallen dumb, and the wounds are all healed; but the immortal words in which he wails the pain of misapprehension and rejection are engraved for ever on the heart of the world. No suffering is more acute than that of a sensitive soul, brimming with love and eagerness to help, and met with scorn, rejection and ferocious mockery of its sacredest emotions. No man has ever felt that pang with the intensity with which Jesus felt it, for none has ever brought such wealth of longing love to be thrown back on itself, nor been so devoid of the callousness with which selfishness is shielded. His pure nature was tender as an infant's hand, and felt the keen edge of the spear as none but He can have done. They are His sorrows that are painted here, so vividly and truly that the evangelist Luke takes the very word of the LXX. version of the psalm to describe

the rulers' mockery (Luke xxiii. 35). "They draw open the lips," grinning with delight or contempt, "they nod the head" in mockery and assent to the suffering inflicted; and then the savage hate bursts into irony which defiles the sacredest emotions and comes near to blaspheming God in ridiculing trust in Him. The mockers thought it exquisite sarcasm to bid Jesus roll His troubles on Jehovah, and to bid God deliver Him since He delighted in Him. How little they knew that they were thereby proclaiming Him as the Christ of prophecy, and were giving the unimpeachable testimony of enemies to His life of devout trust and His consciousness of Divine favour! "Roll (it) on God," sneered they; and the answer was, "Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit." "Let Him deliver Him, since He delighteth in Him," they impiously cried, and they knew not that God's delight in Him was the very reason why He did not deliver Him. Because He was His Son in whom He was well pleased, "it pleased the Lord to bruise Him." The mockery of opponents brings into clear light the deepest secrets of that cross.

Another wave of feeling follows in the next strophe (vv. 9–11). Backwards and forwards, from trust to complaint and from complaint to trust, rolls the troubled sea of thought, each mood evoking its opposite. Now reproach makes the psalmist tighten his grasp on God, and plead former help as a reason for present hearing. Faith turns taunts into prayers. This strophe begins with a "Yea," and, on the relationship with God which the enemies had ridiculed and which his heart knows to be true, pleads that God would not remain, as ver. 1 had wailed that He was, far off from His help. It goes back to the beginning of life, and in the mystery of birth and the dependence of infancy finds arguments

with God. They are the personal application of the wide truth that God by His making us men gives us a claim on Him, that He has bound Himself by giving life to give what is needful for its development and well-being. He will not stultify Himself by making a man and then leaving him to struggle alone, as birds do with their young, as soon as they can fly. He is "a faithful Creator." May we venture to find special reference here to the mystery of the Incarnation? It is noticeable that "my mother" is emphatically mentioned, while there is no reference to a father. No doubt the cast of the thought accounts for that, but still the special agency of Divine power in the birth of Jesus gives special force to His prayer for Divine help in the life so peculiarly the result of the Divine hand. But while the plea had singular force on Christ's lips, it is valid for all men.

The closing verse of this strophe takes the complaint of ver. 1 and turns it into prayer. Faith does not rest with plaintively crying "Why art Thou so far?" but pleads "Be not far"; and makes the nearness of trouble and the absence of all other help its twofold pleas. So much the psalmist has already won by his communing with God. Now he can face environing sorrows and solitary defencelessness, and feel them to be reasons for God's coming, not tokens of His distance.

We now come to two strophes of two verses each (vv. 12–15), of which the former describes the encircling foes and the latter the psalmist's failure of vital power. The metaphor of raging wild animals recurs in later verses, and is common to many psalms. Bashan was a land of pastures over which herds of half wild cattle roamed. They "have surrounded me" is a picturesque touch, drawn direct from life, as any one knows who

has ever found himself in the midst of such a herd. The gaping mouth is rather characteristic of the lion than of the bull. The open jaws emit the fierce roar which precedes the fatal spring and the "ravening" on its prey. The next short strophe passes from enemies around to paint inward feebleness. All vital force has melted away; the very bones are dislocated, raging thirst has supervened. These are capable of being construed as simply strong metaphors, parallels to which may be found in other psalms; but it must not be left unnoticed that they are accurate transcripts of the physical effects of crucifixion. That torture killed by exhaustion, it stretched the body as on a rack, it was attended with agonies of thirst. It requires considerable courage to brush aside such coincidences as accidental, in obedience to a theory of interpretation. But the picture is not completed when the bodily sufferings are set forth. A mysterious attribution of them all to God closes the strophe. "Thou hast brought me to the dust of death." Then, it is God's hand that has laid all these on him. No doubt this may be, and probably was in the psalmist's thought, only a devout recognition of Providence working through calamities; but the words receive full force only by being regarded as parallel with those of Isa. liii. 10, "He hath put Him to grief." In like manner the apostolic preaching regards Christ's murderers as God's instruments.

The next strophe returns to the three-verse arrangement, and blends the contents of the two preceding, dealing both with the assailing enemies and the enfeebled sufferer. The former metaphor of wild animals encircling him is repeated with variations. A baser order of foes than bulls and lions, namely a troop of cowardly curs, are snarling and snapping round him.

The contemptuous figure is explained in ver. 16 *b*, as meaning a mob of evildoers, and is then resumed in the next clause, which has been the subject of so much dispute. It seems plain that the Massoretic text is corrupt. "Like a lion, my hands and my feet" can only be made into sense by violent methods. The difference between the letters which yield "like a lion" and those which give "they pierced" is only in the length of the upright stroke of the final one. LXX. Vulg. Syr. translate *they dug* or *pierced*, and other ancient versions attest that they read the word as a verb. The spelling of the word is anomalous, if we take it to mean *dig*, but the irregularity is not without parallels, and may be smoothed away either by assuming an unusual form of a common verb or a rare root cognate with the more common one. The word would then mean "they dug" rather than *pierced*, but the shade of difference in meaning is not so great as to forbid the latter rendering. In any case "it is the best attested reading. It is to be understood of the gaping wounds which are inflicted on the sufferer's hands and feet, and which stare at him like holes" (Baethgen, "Hand Comment.," p. 65). "Behold my hands and my feet," said the risen Lord, and that calm word is sufficient proof that both bore the prints of nails. The words might be written over this psalm. Strange and sad that so many should look on it and not see Him!

The picture of bodily sufferings has one more touch in "I can count all my bones." Emaciation would produce that effect. But so would crucifixion which extended the frame and threw the bones of the thorax into prominence. Then the sufferer turns his eyes once more to his enemies, and describes the stony gaze, protracted and unfeeling, with which they feed

upon his agonies. Crucifixion was a slow process, and we recall the long hours in which the crowds sated their hatred through their eyes.

It is extremely unlikely that the psalmist's garments were literally parted among his foes, and the usual explanation of the singular details in ver. 18 is that they are either a metaphor drawn from plundering the slain in battle or a proverbial expression. What reference the words had to the original speaker of them must, in our ignorance of his circumstances, remain uncertain. But they at all events depict his death as so sure that his enemies regard his dress as their perquisite. Surely this is a distinct instance of Divine guidance moulding a psalmist's words so as to fill them with a deeper meaning than the speaker knew. He who so shaped them saw the soldiers dividing the rest of the garments and gambling for the seamless cloak; and He was "the Spirit of Christ which was in" the singer.

The next strophe closes the first part with petition which, in the last words, becomes thanksgiving, and realises the answer so fervently besought. The initial complaint of God's distance is again turned into prayer, and the former metaphors of wild beasts are gathered into one long cry for deliverance from the dangerous weapons of each, the dog's paw, the lion's mouth, the wild oxen's horns. The psalmist speaks of his "soul" or life as "my only one," referring not to his isolation, but to his life as that which, once lost, could never be regained. He has but one life, therefore he clings to it, and cannot but believe that it is precious in God's eyes. And then, all at once, up shoots a clear light of joy, and he knows that he has not been speaking to a deaf or remote God, but that his cry is answered. He had been brought to the dust of death,

but even thence he is heard and brought out with no soil of it upon him. Such suddenness and completeness of deliverance from such extremity of peril may, indeed, have been experienced by many, but receives its fullest meaning in its Messianic application. "From the horns of the wild oxen," says he, as if the phrase were still dependent, like the preceding ones, on the prayer, "deliver me." But, as he thus cries, the conviction that he is heard floods his soul, and he ends, not with a cry for help, but with that one rapturous word, "Thou hast answered me." It is like a parting burst of sunshine at the end of a day of tempest. A man already transfixed by a buffalo's horns has little hope of escape, but even thence God delivers. The psalmist did not know, but the Christian reader should not forget that the Prince of sufferers was yet more wondrously delivered from death by passing through death, and that by His victory all who cleave to Him are, in like manner, saved from the horns even while these gore them, and are then victors over death when they fall beneath its dart.

The consequences of the psalmist's deliverance are described in the last part (vv. 22–31) in language so wide that it is hard to suppose that any man could think his personal experiences so important and far-reaching. The whole congregation of Israel are to share in his thanksgiving and to learn more of God's name through him (vv. 22–6). Nor does that bound his anticipations, for they traverse the whole world and embrace all lands and ages, and contemplate that the story of his sufferings and triumph will prove a true gospel, bringing every country and generation to remember and turn to Jehovah. The exuberant language becomes but one mouth. Such consequences, so wide-spread and age-

long, can follow from the story of but one life. If the sorrows of the preceding part can only be a description of the passion, the glories of the second can only be a vision of the universal and eternal kingdom of Christ. It is a gospel before the Gospels and an Apocalypse before Revelations.

In the first strophe (vv. 22–6) the delivered singer vows to make God's name known to His brethren. The epistle to the Hebrews quotes the vow as not only expressive of our Lord's true manhood, but as specifying its purpose. Jesus became man that men might learn to know God; and the knowledge of His name streams most brightly from the cross. The death and resurrection, the sufferings and glory of Christ open deeper regions in the character of God than even His gracious life disclosed. Rising from the dead and exalted to the throne, He has "a new song" in His immortal lips, and more to teach concerning God than He had before.

The psalm calls Israel to praise with the singer, and tells the ground of their joyful songs (vv. 23, 24). Here the absence of any reference to the relation which the New Testament reveals between these sufferings and that praise is to be noted as an instance of the gradual development of prophecy. "We are not yet on the level of Isaiah liii." (Kirkpatrick, "Psalms," 122). The close of this part speaks of a sacrifice of which "the humble shall eat and be satisfied"—"I will pay my vows"—*i.e.* the thankofferings vowed when in trouble. The custom of feasting on the "sacrifices for peace-offering for thanksgiving" (Lev. vii. 15) is here referred to, but the ceremonial garb covers spiritual truth. The condition of partaking in this feast is humility, that poverty of spirit which knows itself to

be hungry and unable to find food for itself. The consequence of partaking is satisfaction—a deep truth reaching far beyond the ceremonial emblem. A further result is that "your heart shall live for ever"—an unmeaning hyperbole, but in one application of the words. We penetrate to the core of the psalm in this part, when we read it in the light of Christ's words. "My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed," and when we connect it with the central act of Christian worship, the Lord's Supper.

The universal and perpetual diffusion of the kingdom and knowledge of God is the theme of the closing strain (vv. 27–31). That diffusion is not definitely stated as the issue of the sufferings or deliverance, but the very fact that such a universal knowledge comes into view here requires that it should be so regarded, else the unity of the psalm is shattered. While, therefore, the ground alleged in ver. 28 for this universal recognition of God is only His universal dominion, we must suppose that the history of the singer as told to the world is the great fact which brings home to men the truth of God's government over and care for them. True, men know God apart from revelation and from the gospel, but He is to them a forgotten God, and the great influence which helps them to "remember and turn to Jehovah" is the message of the Cross and the Throne of Jesus.

The psalm had just laid down the condition of partaking in the sacrificial meal as being lowliness, and (ver. 29) it prophecies that the "fat" shall also share in it. That can only be, if they become "humble." Great and small, lofty and low must take the same place and accept the food of their souls as a meal of charity. The following words are very difficult, as

the text stands. There would appear to be a contrast intended between the obese self-complacency of the prosperous and proud, and the pauper-like misery of "those who are going down to the dust" and who "cannot keep their soul alive," that is, who are in such penury and wretchedness that they are all but dead. There is a place for ragged outcasts at the table side by side with the "fat on earth." Others take the words as referring to those already dead, and see here a hint that the dim regions of Sheol receive beams of the great light and some share in the great feast. The thought is beautiful, but too remote from anything else in the Old Testament to be adopted here. Various attempts at conjectural emendations and redivision of clauses have been made in order to lighten the difficulties of the verse. However attractive some of these are, the existing reading yields a not unworthy sense, and is best adhered to.

As universality in extent, so perpetuity in duration is anticipated for the story of the psalmist's deliverance and for the praise to God thence accruing. "A seed shall serve Him." That is one generation of obedient worshippers. "It shall be told of Jehovah unto the [next] generation." That is, a second, who shall receive from their progenitors, the seed that serves, the blessed story. "They. . . shall declare His righteousness unto a people that shall be born." That is, a third, which in its turn receives the good news from parents' lips. And what is the word which thus maintains itself living amid dying generations, and blesses each, and impels each to bequeath it as their best treasure to their successors? "That He hath done." Done what? With eloquent silence the psalm omits to specify. What was it that was meant by that

word on the cross which, with like reticence, forbore to tell of what it spoke? "He hath done." "It is finished." No one word can express all that was accomplished in that sacrifice. Eternity will not fully supply the missing word, for the consequences of that finished work go on unfolding for ever, and are for ever unfinished, because for ever increasing.

PSALM XXIII.

1 **Jehovah is my** Shepherd; I do not want.
2 **In pastures of fresh grass He leads me;**
By waters of rest He makes me lie.
3 **My soul He refreshes;**
He guides me in paths of righteousness [straight paths] for His name's sake.
4 **Even if I walk in a gorge of gloom, I fear not evil, for Thou art with me;**
Thy rod and Thy staff—they comfort me.

5 **Thou spreadest before me a table in presence of my foes;**
Thou anointest with oil my head: my cup is overfulness.
6 **Only good and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,**
And my dwelling shall be in the house of Jehovah for length of days.

THE world could spare many a large book better than this sunny little psalm. It has dried many tears and supplied the mould into which many hearts have poured their peaceful faith. To suppose that the speaker is the personified nation chills the whole. The tone is too intense not to be the outcome of personal experience, however admissible the application to the nation may be as secondary. No doubt Jehovah is the Shepherd of Israel in several Asaphite psalms and in Jeremiah; but, notwithstanding great authorities, I cannot persuade myself that the voice which comes so straight to the heart did not come from the heart of a brother speaking across the centuries his own personal emotions, which are universal just because they are individual. It is the pure utterance of personal

trust in Jehovah, darkened by no fears or complaints and so perfectly at rest that it has nothing more to ask. For the time desire is stilled in satisfaction. One tone, and that the most blessed which can sound in a life, is heard through the whole. It is the psalm of quiet trust, undisturbed even by its joy, which is quiet too. The fire glows, but does not flame or crackle. The one thought is expanded in two kindred images: that of the shepherd and that of the host. The same ideas are substantially repeated under both forms. The lovely series of vivid pictures, each but a clause long, but clear-cut in that small compass, like the fine work incised on a gem, combines with the depth and simplicity of the religious emotion expressed, to lay this sweet psalm on all hearts.

Vv. 1–4 present the realities of the devout life under the image of the Divine Shepherd and His lamb.

The comparison of rulers to shepherds is familiar to many tongues, and could scarcely fail to occur to a pastoral people like the Jews, nor is the application to Jehovah's relation to the people so recondite that we need to relegate the psalms in which it occurs to a late era in the national history. The psalmist lovingly lingers on the image, and draws out the various aspects of the shepherd's care and of the flock's travels, with a ripeness and calmness which suggests that we listen to a much-experienced man. The sequence in which the successive pictures occur is noteworthy. Guidance to refreshment comes first, and is described in ver. 2, in words which fall as softly as the gentle streams of which they speak. The noontide is fierce, and the land lies baking in the sun-blaze; but deep down in some wady runs a brook, and along its course the herbage is bright with perpetual moisture, and among

the lush grass are cool lairs where the footsore, panting flock may couch. The shepherd's tenderness is beautifully hinted at in the two verbs: he "leads," not drives, but in Eastern wise precedes and so draws the trustful sheep; he "makes me to lie down," taking care that the sheep shall stretch weary limbs in full enjoyment of repose. God thus guides to rest and lays to rest the soul that follows Him. Why does the psalmist begin with this aspect of life? Because it is fittest to express the shepherd's care, and because it is, after all, the predominant aspect to the devout heart. Life is full of trial and effort, but it is an unusually rainy region where rain falls on more than half the days of the year. We live so much more vividly and fully in the moments of agony or crisis that they seem to fill more space than they really do. But they are only moments, and the periods of continued peaceful possession of blessings are measured by years. But the sweet words of the psalm are not to be confined to material good. The psalmist does not tell us whether he is thinking more of the outer or of the inner life, but both are in his mind, and while his confidence is only partially warranted by the facts of the former, it is unlimitedly true in regard to the latter. In that application of the words the significance of the priority given to the pastures of fresh springing grass and the waters of repose is plain, for there the rest of trust and the drinking of living water must precede all walking in paths of righteousness.

Food and drink and rest refresh fainting powers, and this reinvigoration is meant by "restoring my soul" or life.

But the midday or nightly rest is intended to fit for effort, and so a second little picture follows in ver. 3,

presenting another aspect of the shepherd's care and of the sheep's course. Out again on to the road, in spite of heat and dust, the flock goes. "Paths of righteousness" is perhaps best taken as "straight paths," as that rendering keeps within the bounds of the metaphor; but since the sheep are men, straight paths for them must needs be paths of righteousness. That guidance is "for His name's sake." God has regard to His revealed character in shepherding His lamb, and will give direction because He is what He is, and in order that He may be known to be what He has declared Himself. The psalmist had learned the purpose of repose and refreshment which, in all regions of life, are intended to prepare for tasks and marches. We are to "drink for strength, and not for drunkenness." A man may lie in a bath till strength is diminished, or may take his plunge and come from it braced for work. In the religious life it is possible to commit an analogous error, and to prize so unwisely peaceful hours of communion, as to waive imperative duty for the sake of them; like Peter with his "Let us make here three tabernacles," while there were devil-ridden sufferers waiting to be healed down on the plain. Moments of devotion, which do not prepare for hours of practical righteousness, are very untrustworthy. But, on the other hand, the paths of righteousness will not be trodden by those who have known nothing of the green pastures and waters where the wearied can rest.

But life has another aspect than these two—rest and toil; and the guidance into danger and sorrow is as tender as its other forms are. The singular word rendered "shadow of death" should probably simply be "gloomy darkness," such, for instance, as in the shaft of a mine (Job xxviii. 3). But, even if the former

rendering is retained, it is not to be interpreted as meaning actual death. No wise forward look can ignore the possibility of many sorrows and the certainty of some. Hope has ever something of dread in her eyes. The road will not be always bright and smooth, but will sometimes plunge down into grim cañons, where no sunbeams reach. But even that anticipation may be calm. "Thou art with me" is enough. He who guides into the gorge will guide through it. It is not a *cul de sac*, shut in with precipices at the far end; but it opens out on shining tablelands, where there is greener pasture. The rod and staff seem to be two names for one instrument, which was used both to beat off predatory animals and to direct the sheep. The two synonyms and the appended pronoun express by their redundancy the full confidence of the psalmist. He will not fear, though there are grounds enough for terror, in the dark valley; and though sense prompts him to dread, he conquers fear because he trusts. "Comfort" suggests a struggle, or, as Calvin says, "Quorsum enim consolatio ipsa, nisi quia metus eum solicitat?"

The second image of the Divine Host and His guest is expanded in vv. 5, 6. The ideas are substantially the same as in the first part. Repose and provision, danger and change, again fill the foreground; and again there is forecast of a more remote future. But all is intensified, the need and the supply being painted in stronger colours and the hope being brighter. The devout man is God's guest while he marches through foes, and travels towards perpetual repose in the house of Jehovah.

Jehovah supplies His servants' wants in the midst of conflict The table spread in the sight of the enemy is

a more signal token of care and power than the green pastures are. Life is not only journey and effort, but conflict; and it is possible not only to have seasons of refreshment interspersed in the weary march, but to find a sudden table spread by the same unseen hand which holds back the foes, who look on with grim eyes, powerless to intercept the sustenance or disturb the guests. This is the condition of God's servant—always conflict, but always a spread table. Joy snatched in the face of danger is specially poignant. The flowers that bloom on the brink of a cataract are bright, and their tremulous motion adds a charm. Special experiences of God's sufficiency are wont to come in seasons of special difficulty, as many a true heart knows. It is no scanty meal that waits God's soldier under such circumstances, but a banquet accompanied with signs of festivity, viz., the head anointed with oil and the cup which is "fulness." God's supplies are wont to surpass the narrow limits of need and even to transcend capacity, having a something over which as yet we are unable to take in, but which is not disproportioned or wasted, since it widens desire and thereby increases receptivity.

In the last verse we seem to pass to pure anticipation. Memory melts into hope, and that brighter than the forecast which closed the first part. There the psalmist's trust simply refused to yield to fear, while keenly conscious of evil which might warrant it; but here he has risen higher, and the alchemy of his happy faith and experience has converted evil into something fairer. "*Only* good and mercy shall follow me." There is no evil for the heart wedded to Jehovah; there are no foes to pursue, but two bright-faced angels walk behind him as his rear-guard. It is much

when the retrospect of life can, like Jacob on his death-bed, see "the Angel which redeemed me from all evil"; but it is perhaps more when the else fearful heart can look forward and say that not only will it fear no evil, but that nothing but blessings, the outcome of God's mercy, will ever reach it.

The closing hope of dwelling in the house of Jehovah to length of days rises above even the former verse. The singer knew himself a guest of God's at the table spread before the foe, but that was, as it were, refreshment on the march, while this is continual abiding in the home. Such an unbroken continuity of abode in the house of Jehovah is a familiar aspiration in other psalms, and is always regarded as possible even while hands are engaged in ordinary duties and cares. The psalms which conceive of the religious life under this image are marked by a peculiar depth and inwardness. They are wholesomely mystical. The hope of this guest of God's is that, by the might of fixed faith and continual communion, he may have his life so hid in God that wherever he goes he may still be in His house, and whatever he does he may still be "inquiring in His temple." The hope is here confined to the earthly present, but the Christian reading of the psalm can scarcely fail to transfer the words to a future. God will bring those whom He has fed and guided in journeying and conflict to an unchanging mansion in a home beyond the stars. Here we eat at a table spread with pilgrims' food, manna from heaven and water from the rock. We eat in haste and with an eye on the foe, but we may hope to sit down at another table in the perfected kingdom. The end of the fray is the beginning of the feast. "We shall go no more out."

PSALM XXIV.

1 Jehovah's is the earth, and what fills it,
The world and the dwellers therein.
2 For He—upon the seas He founded it,
And upon the floods established it.

3 Who may ascend into the hill of Jehovah,
And who may stand in His holy place?

4 The clean-handed and pure-hearted,
Who lifts not his desire to vanity,
And swears not to falsehood.
5 He shall receive blessing from Jehovah
And righteousness from the God of his salvation.
6 This is the generation of them that seek Him,
That seek Thy face; [this is] Jacob. Selah.

7 Lift up, O gates, your heads,
Yea, lift up yourselves, O ancient doors,
That the King of glory may come in.
8 Who then is the King of glory?
Jehovah, strong and a Champion,
Jehovah, a Champion in battle.

9 Lift up, O gates, your heads,
Yea, lift them up, O ancient doors,
That the King of glory may come in.
10 Who is He, then, the King of glory?
Jehovah of hosts,
He is the King of glory. Selah.

EWALD'S widely accepted view that this psalm is a composite of two fragments rests on a somewhat exaggerated estimate of the differences in tone and structure of the parts. These are obvious, but do not demand the hypothesis of compilation; and the

original author has as good a right to be credited with the uniting thought as the supposed editor has. The usually alleged occasion of the psalm fits its tone so well and gives such appropriateness to some of its phrases that stronger reasons than are forthcoming are required to negative it. The account in 2 Sam. vi. tells of exuberant enthusiasm and joy, of which some echo sounds in the psalm. It is a processional hymn, celebrating Jehovah's entrance to His house; and that one event, apprehended on its two sides, informs the whole. Hence the two halves have the same interchange of question and answer, and the two questions correspond, the one inquiring the character of the men who dare dwell with God, the other the name of the God who dwells with men. The procession is climbing the steep to the gates of the ancient Jebusite fortress, recently won by David. As it climbs, the song proclaims Jehovah as the universal Lord, basing the truth of His special dwelling in Zion upon that of His world-wide rule. The question, so fitting the lips of the climbers, is asked, possibly in solo, and the answer describing the qualifications of true worshippers, and possibly choral (vv. 3–6), is followed by a long-drawn musical interlude. Now the barred gates are reached. A voice summons them to open. The guards within, or possibly the gates themselves, endowed by the poet with consciousness and speech, ask who thus demands entrance. The answer is a triumphant shout from the procession. But the question is repeated, as if to allow of the still fuller reiteration of Jehovah's name, which shakes the grey walls; and then, with clang of trumpets and clash of cymbals, the ancient portals creak open, and Jehovah "enters into His rest, He and the ark of His strength."

Jehovah's dwelling on Zion did not mean His desertion of the rest of the world, nor did His choice of Israel imply His abdication of rule over, or withdrawal of blessings from, the nations. The light which glorified the bare hilltop, where the Ark rested, was reflected thence over all the world. "The glory" was there concentrated, not confined. This psalm guards against all superstitious misconceptions, and protests against national narrowness, in exactly the same way as Exod. xix. 5 bases Israel's selection from among all peoples on the fact that "all the earth is Mine."

"Who may ascend?" was a picturesquely appropriate question for singers toiling upwards, and "who may stand?" for those who hoped presently to enter the sacred presence. The Ark which they bore had brought disaster to Dagon's temple, so that the Philistine lords had asked in terror, "Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?" and at Beth-shemesh its presence had been so fatal that David had abandoned the design of bringing it up and said, "How shall the ark of the Lord come to me?" The answer, which lays down the qualifications of true dwellers in Jehovah's house, may be compared with the similar outlines of ideal character in Psalm xv. and Isa. xxxiii. 14. The one requirement is purity. Here that requirement is deduced from the majesty of Jehovah, as set forth in vv. 1, 2, and from the designation of His dwelling as "holy." This is the postulate of the whole Psalter. In it the approach to Jehovah is purely spiritual, even while the outward access is used as a symbol; and the conditions are of the same nature as the approach. The general truth implied is that the character of the God determines the character of the worshippers. Worship is supreme admiration,

culminating in imitation. Its law is always "They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them." A god of war will have warriors, and a god of lust sensualists, for his devotees. The worshippers in Jehovah's holy place must be holy. The details of the answer are but the echoes of a conscience enlightened by the perception of His character. In ver. 4 it may be noted that of the four aspects of purity enumerated the two central refer to the inward life (*pure heart; lifts not his desire unto vanity*), and these are embedded, as it were, in the outward life of deeds and words. Purity of act is expressed by "clean hands"—neither red with blood, nor foul with grubbing in dunghills for gold and other so-called good. Purity of speech is condensed into the one virtue of truthfulness (*swears not to a falsehood*). But the outward will only be right if the inward disposition is pure, and that inward purity will only be realised when desires are carefully curbed and directed. As is the desire, so is the man. Therefore the prime requisite for a pure heart is the withdrawal of affection, esteem, and longing from the solid-seeming illusions of sense. "Vanity" has, indeed, the special meaning of *idols*, but the notion of earthly good apart from God is more relevant here.

In ver. 5 the possessor of such purity is represented as receiving "a blessing, even righteousness," from God, which is by many taken to mean beneficence on the part of God, "inasmuch as, according to the Hebrew religious view of the world, all good is regarded as reward from God's retributive righteousness, and consequently as that of man's own righteousness or right conduct" (Hupfeld). The expression is thus equivalent to "salvation" in the next clause. But, while the word has

this meaning in some places, it does not seem necessary to adopt it here, where the ordinary meaning is quite appropriate. Such a man as is described in ver. 4 will have God's blessing on his efforts after purity, and a Divine gift will furnish him with that which he strives after. The hope is not lit by the full sunshine of New Testament truth, but it approximates thereto. It dimly anticipates "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness"; and it feels after the great thought that the highest righteousness is not to be won, but to be accepted, even while it only asserts that man's effort after must precede his possession of righteousness. We can give the words a deeper meaning, and see in them the dawn of the later teaching that righteousness must be "received" from "the God of salvation."

Ver. 6 seems to carry the adumbration of truth not yet disclosed a step further. A great planet is trembling into visibility, and is divined before it is seen. The emphasis in ver. 6 is on "seek," and the implication is that the men who seek find. If we seek God's face, we shall receive purity. There the psalm touches the foundation. The Divine heart so earnestly desires to give righteousness that to seek is to find. In that region a wish brings an answer, and no outstretched hand remains empty. Things of less worth have to be toiled and fought for; but the most precious of all is a gift, to be had for the asking. That thought did not stand clearly before the Old Testament worshippers, but it struggles towards expression in many a psalm, as it could not but do whenever a devout heart pondered the problems of conduct. We have abundant warnings against the anachronism of thrusting New Testament doctrine into the Psalms, but it is no less one-sided to ignore anticipations which could not but

spring up where there was earnest wrestling with the thoughts of sin and of the need for purity.

Are we to adopt the supplement, "O God of," before the abrupt "Jacob"? The clause is harsh in any construction. The preceding "thy" seems to require the addition, as God is not directly addressed elsewhere in the psalm. On the other hand, the declaration that such seekers are the true people of God is a worthy close of the whole description, and the reference to the "face" of God verbally recalls Peniel and that wonderful incident when Jacob became Israel. The seeker after God will have that scene repeated, and be able to say, "I have seen God." The abrupt introduction of "Jacob" is made more emphatic by the musical interlude which closes the first part.

There is a pause, while the procession ascends the hill of the Lord, revolving the stringent qualifications for entrance. It stands before the barred gates, while possibly part of the choir is within. The advancing singers summon the doors to open and receive the incoming Jehovah. Their portals are too low for Him to enter, and therefore they are called upon to lift their lintels. They are grey with age, and round them cluster long memories; therefore they are addressed as "gates of ancient time." The question from within expresses ignorance and hesitation, and dramatically represents the ancient gates as sharing the relation of the former inhabitants to the God of Israel, whose name they did not know, and whose authority they did not own. It heightens the force of the triumphant shout proclaiming His mighty name. He is Jehovah, the self-existent God, who has made a covenant with Israel, and fights for His people, as these grey walls bear witness. His warrior might had wrested them from their former possessors, and

the gates must open for their Conqueror. The repeated question is pertinacious and animated: "Who then is He, the King of glory?" as if recognition and surrender were reluctant. The answer is sharp and authoritative, being at once briefer and fuller. It peals forth the great name "Jehovah of hosts." There may be reference in the name to God's command of the armies of Israel, thereby expressing the religious character of their wars; but the "hosts" include the angels, "His ministers who do His pleasure," and the stars, of which He brings forth the hosts by number. In fact, the conception underlying the name is that of the universe as an ordered whole, a disciplined army, a cosmos obedient to His voice. It is the same conception which the centurion had learned from his legion, where the utterance of one will moved all the stern, shining ranks. That mighty name, like a charge of explosives, bursts the gates of brass asunder, and the procession sweeps through them amid yet another burst of triumphant music.

PSALM XXV.

1 (א) Unto Thee, Jehovah, I uplift my soul;
[On Thee I wait all the day, O my God!].
2 (ב) On Thee I hang: let me not be put to shame;
Let not my enemies exult over me.
3 (ג) Yea, all who wait on Thee shall not be put to shame;
Put to shame shall they be who faithlessly forsake Thee without cause.
4 (ד) Thy ways, Jehovah, make me to know;
Thy paths teach Thou me.
5 (ה) Make me walk in Thy troth, and teach me,
For Thou art the God of my salvation.
6 (ו) Remember Thy compassions, Jehovah, and Thy loving-kindnesses,
For from of old are they.
7 (ז) Sins of my youth and my transgression remember not;
According to Thy loving-kindness remember me,
For Thy goodness' sake, Jehovah.
8 (ח) Good and upright is Jehovah;
Therefore He instructs sinners in the way.
9 (ט) He will cause the meek to walk in that which is right,
And will teach the meek His way.
10 (י) All the paths of Jehovah are loving-kindness and troth
To keepers of His covenant and His testimonies.
11 (כ) For Thy name's sake, Jehovah,
Pardon my iniquity, for great is it.
12 (ל) Who, then, is the man who fears Jehovah?
He will instruct him in the way he should choose.
13 (מ) Himself shall dwell in prosperity,
And his seed shall possess the land.
14 (נ) The secret of Jehovah is [told] to them that fear Him,
And His covenant He makes them know.
15 (ס) My eyes are continually toward Jehovah,
For He, He shall bring out my feet from the net.

16 (ב) Turn Thee unto me, and be gracious to me,
For solitary and afflicted am I.
17 (ע) The straits of my heart do Thou enlarge (?),
And from my distresses bring me out.
18 (ר) Look on my affliction and my travail,
And lift away all my sins.
19 (ר) Look on my enemies, for they are many,
And they hate me with cruel hate.
20 (ש) Keep my soul and deliver me;
Let me not be put to shame, for I have taken refuge in Thee.
21 (ת) Let integrity and uprightness guard me,
For I wait on Thee.
22 Redeem Israel, O God,
From all his straits.

THE recurrence of the phrase "lift up the soul" may have determined the place of this psalm next to Psalm xxiv. It is acrostic, but with irregularities. As the text now stands, the second, not the first, word in ver. 2 begins with Beth; Vav is omitted or represented in the "and teach me" of the He verse (ver. 5); Qoph is also omitted, and its place taken by a supernumerary Resh, which letter has thus two verses (18, 19); and ver. 22 begins with Pe, and is outside the scheme of the psalm, both as regards alphabetic structure and subject. The same peculiarities of deficient Vav and superfluous Pe verses reappear in another acrostic psalm (xxxiv.), in which the initial word of the last verse is, as here, "redeem." Possibly the two psalms are connected.

The fetters of the acrostic structure forbid freedom and progress of thought, and almost compel repetition. It is fitted for meditative reiteration of favourite emotions or familiar axioms, and results in a loosely twined wreath rather than in a column with base, shaft, and capital. A slight trace of consecution of parts may be noticed in the division of the verses (excluding ver 22)

into three sevens, of which the first is prayer, the second meditation on the Divine character and the blessings secured by covenant to them who fear Him, and the third is bent round, wreath-like, to meet the first, and is again prayer. Such alternation of petition and contemplation is like the heart's beat of the religious life, now expanding in desire, now closing in possession. The psalm has no marks of occasion or period. It deals with the permanent elements in a devout man's relation to God.

The first prayer-section embraces the three standing needs: protection, guidance, and forgiveness. With these are intertwined their pleas according to the logic of faith—the suppliant's uplifted desires and God's eternal tenderness and manifested mercy. The order of mention of the needs proceeds from without inwards, for protection from enemies is superficial as compared with illumination as to duty, and deeper than even that, as well as prior in order of time (and therefore last in order of enumeration), is pardon. Similarly the pleas go deeper as they succeed each other; for the psalmist's trust and waiting is superficial as compared with the plea breathed in the name of "the God of my salvation"; and that general designation leads to the gaze upon the ancient and changeless mercies, which constitute the measure and pattern of God's working (*according to*, ver. 7), and upon the self-originated motive, which is the deepest and strongest of all arguments with Him (*for Thy goodness' sake*, ver. 7).

A qualification of the guest in God's house was in Psalm xxiv. the negative one that he did not lift up his soul—*i.e.*, set his desires—on the emptinesses of time and sense. Here the psalmist begins with the plea that he has set his on Jehovah, and, as the position of

"Unto Thee, Jehovah," at the beginning shows, on Him alone. The very nature of such aspiration after God demands that it shall be exclusive. "All in all or not at all" is the requirement of true devotion, and such completeness is not attained without continual withdrawal of desire from created good. The tendrils of the heart must be untwined from other props before they can be wreathed round their true stay. The irregularity in ver. 2, where the second, not the first, word of the verse begins with Beth, may be attenuated by treating the Divine name as outside the acrostic order. An acute conjecture, however, that the last clause of ver. 5 really belongs to ver. 1 and should include "my God" now in ver. 2, has much in its favour. Its transposition restores to both verses the two-claused structure which runs through the psalm, gets rid of the acrostical anomaly, and emphasises the subsequent reference to those who wait on Jehovah in ver. 3.

In that case ver. 2 begins with the requisite letter. It passes from plea to petition: "Let me not be shamed." Trust that was not vindicated by deliverance would cover the face with confusion. "Hopes that breed not shame" are the treasure of him whose hope is in Jehovah. Foes unnamed threaten; but the stress of the petitions in the first section of the psalm is less on enemies than on sins. One cry for protection from the former is all that the psalmist utters, and then his prayer swiftly turns to deeper needs. In the last section the petitions are more exclusively for deliverance from enemies. Needful as such escape is, it is less needful than the knowledge of God's ways, and the man in extremest peril orders his desires rightly, if he asks holiness first and safety second. The cry

in ver. 2 rests upon the confidence nobly expressed in ver. 3, in which the verbs are not optatives, but futures, declaring a truth certain to be realised in the psalmist's experience, because it is true for all who, like him, wait on Jehovah. True prayer is the individual's sheltering himself under the broad folds of the mantle that covers all who pray. The double confidence as to the waiters on Jehovah and the "treacherous without cause" is the summary of human experience as read by faith. Sense has much to adduce in contradiction, but the dictum is nevertheless true, only its truth does not always appear in the small arc of the circle which lies between cradle and grave.

The prayer for deliverance glides into that for guidance, since the latter is the deeper need, and the former will scarcely be answered unless the suppliant's will docilely offers the latter. The soul lifted to Jehovah will long to know His will and submit itself to His manifold teachings. "Thy ways" and "Thy paths" necessarily mean here the ways in which Jehovah desires that the psalmist should go. "In Thy truth" is ambiguous, both as to the preposition and the noun. The clause may either present God's truth (*i.e.*, faithfulness) as His motive for answering the prayer, or His truth (*i.e.*, the objective revelation) as the path for men. Predominant usage inclines to the former signification of the noun, but the possibility still remains of regarding God's faithfulness as the path in which the psalmist desires to be led, *i.e.* to experience it. The cry for forgiveness strikes a deeper note of pathos, and, as asking a more wondrous blessing, grasps still more firmly the thought of what Jehovah is and always has been. The appeal is made to "*Thy* compassions and loving-

kindnesses," as belonging to His nature, and to their past exercise as having been "from of old." Emboldened thus, the psalmist can look back on his own past, both on his outbursts of youthful passion and levity, which he calls "failures," as missing the mark, and on the darker evils of later manhood, which he calls "rebellions," and can trust that Jehovah will think upon him *according to His mercy*, and *for the sake of His goodness* or love. The vivid realisation of that Eternal Mercy as the very mainspring of God's actions, and as setting forth, in many an ancient deed, the eternal pattern of His dealings, enables a man to bear the thought of his own sins.

The contemplation of the Divine character prepares the way for the transition to the second group of seven verses, which are mainly meditation on that character and on God's dealings and the blessedness of those who fear Him (vv. 8–14). The thought of God beautifully draws the singer from himself. How deeply and lovingly he had pondered on the name of the Lord before he attained to the grand truth that His goodness and very uprightness pledged Him to show sinners where they should walk! Since there is at the heart of things an infinitely pure and equally loving Being, nothing is more impossible than that He should wrap Himself in thick darkness and leave men to grope after duty. Revelation of the path of life in some fashion is the only conduct consistent with His character. All presumptions are in favour of such Divine teaching; and the fact of sin makes it only the more certain. That fact may separate men from God, but not God from men, and if they transgress, the more need, both in their characters and in God's, is there that He should speak. But while their being sinners does not prevent

His utterance, their disposition determines their actual reception of His teaching, and "the meek" or lowly of heart are His true scholars. His instruction is not wasted on them, and, being welcomed, is increased. A fuller communication of His will rewards the humble acceptance of it. Sinners are led *in* the way; the meek are taught His way. Here the conception of God's way is in transition from its meaning in ver. 4 to that in ver. 10, where it distinctly must mean His manner of dealing with men. They who accept His teaching, and order their paths as He would have them do, will learn that the impulse and meaning of all which He does to them are "mercy and truth," the two great attributes to which the former petitions appealed, and which the humble of heart, who observe the conditions of God's covenant which is witness of His own character and of their duty, will see gleaming with lambent light even in calamities.

The participators, then, in this blessed knowledge have a threefold character: sinners; humble; keepers of the covenant and testimonies. The thought of these requirements drives the psalmist back on himself, as it will do all devout souls, and forces from him a short ejaculation of prayer, which breaks with much pathos and beauty the calm flow of contemplation. The pleas for forgiveness of the "iniquity" which makes him feel unworthy of Jehovah's guidance are remarkable. "For Thy name's sake" appeals to the revealed character of God, as concerned in the suppliant's pardon, inasmuch as it will be honoured thereby, and God will be true to Himself in forgiving. "For it is great" speaks the boldness of helplessness. The magnitude of sin demands a Divine intervention. None else than God can deal with it. Faith makes the very greatness

of sin and extremity of need a reason for God's act of pardon.

Passing from self, the singer again recurs to his theme, reiterating in vivid language and with some amplification the former thoughts. In vv. 8–10 the character of Jehovah was the main subject, and the men whom He blessed were in the background. In vv. 12–14 they stand forward. Their designation now is the wide one of "those who fear Jehovah," and the blessings they receive are, first, that of being taught the way, which has been prominent thus far, but here has a new phase, as being "the way that he should choose"; *i.e.*, God's teaching illuminates the path, and tells a man what he ought to do, while his freedom of choice is uninfringed. Next, outward blessings of settled prosperity shall be his, and his children shall have the promises to Israel fulfilled in their possession of the land. These outward blessings belong to the Old Testament epoch, and can only partially be applied to the present stage of Providence. But the final element of the good man's blessedness (ver. 14) is eternally true. Whether we translate the first word "secret" or "friendship," the sense is substantially the same. Obedience and the true fear of Jehovah directly tend to discernment of His purposes, and will besides be rewarded by whispers from heaven. God would not hide from Abraham what He would do, and still His friend will know His mind better than the disobedient. The last clause of ver. 14 is capable of various renderings. "His covenant" may be in the accusative, and the verb a periphrastic future, as the A.V. takes it, or the former word may be nominative, and the clause be rendered, "And His covenant [is] to make them to know." But the absolute use of the verb without a

specification of the object taught is somewhat harsh, and probably the former rendering is to be preferred. The deeper teaching of the covenant which follows on the fear of the Lord includes both its obligations and blessings, and the knowledge is not mere intellectual perception, but vital experience. In this region life is knowledge, and knowledge life. Whoso "keeps His covenant" (ver. 10) will ever grow in appropriation of its blessings and apprehension of its obligations by his submissive will.

The third heptad of verses returns to simple petition, and that, with one exception (ver. 18 *b*), for deliverance from enemies. This recurrence, in increased intensity, of the consciousness of hostility is not usual, for the psalms which begin with it generally pray themselves out of it. "The peace which passeth understanding," which is the best answer to prayer, has not fully settled on the heaving sea. A heavy ground swell runs in these last short petitions, which all mean substantially the same thing. But there is a beginning of calm; and the renewed petitions are a pattern of that continual knocking of which such great things are said and recorded in Scripture. The section begins with a declaration of patient expectance: "Mine eyes are ever towards Jehovah," with wistful fixedness which does not doubt though it has long to look. Nets are wrapped round his feet, inextricably but for one hand. We can bear to feel our limbs entangled and fettered, if our eyes are free to gaze, and fixed in gazing, upwards. The desired deliverance is thrice presented (ver. 16, "turn unto"; ver. 18, "look upon"; ver. 19, "consider," lit. look upon) as the result of Jehovah's face being directed towards the psalmist.

When Jehovah turns to a man, the light streaming

from His face makes darkness day. The pains on which He "looks" are soothed; the enemies whom He beholds shrivel beneath His eye. The psalmist believes that God's presence, in the deeper sense of that phrase, as manifested partly through delivering acts and partly through inward consciousness, is his one need, in which all deliverances and gladnesses are enwrapped. He plaintively pleads, "For I am alone and afflicted." The soul that has awakened to the sense of the awful solitude of personal being, and stretched out yearning desires to the only God, and felt that with Him it would know no pain in loneliness, will not cry in vain. In ver. 17 a slight alteration in the text, the transference of the final Vav of one word to the beginning of the next, gets rid of the incongruous phrase "are enlarged" as applied to troubles (lit. straits), and gives a prayer which is in keeping with the familiar use of the verb in reference to afflictions: "The troubles of my heart do Thou enlarge [cf. iv. 2; xviii. 36], and from my distresses," etc. Ver. 18 should begin with Qoph, but has Resh, which is repeated in the following verse, to which it rightly belongs. It is at least noteworthy that the anomaly makes the petition for Jehovah's "look" more emphatic, and brings into prominence the twofold direction of it. The "look" on the psalmist's affliction and pain will be tender and sympathetic, as a mother eagle's on her sick eaglet; that on his foes will be stern and destructive, many though they be. In ver. 11 the prayer for pardon was sustained by the plea that the sin was "great"; in ver. 19 that for deliverance from foes rests on the fact that "they are many," for which the verb cognate with the adjective of ver. 11 is used. Thus both dangers without and evils within are regarded

as crying out, by their multitude, for God's intervention. The wreath is twined so that its end is brought round to its beginning. "Let me not be ashamed, for I trust in Thee," is the second petition of the first part repeated; and "I wait on Thee," which is the last word of the psalm, omitting the superfluous verse, echoes the clause which it is proposed to transfer to ver. 1. Thus the two final verses correspond to the two initial, the last but one to the first but one, and the last to the first. The final prayer is that "integrity (probably complete devotion of heart to God) and uprightness" (in relation to men) may preserve him, as guardian angels; but this does not assert the possession of these, but is a petition for the gift of them quite as much as for their preserving action. The implication of that petition is that no harm can imperil or destroy him whom these characteristics guard. That is true in the whole sweep of human life, however often contradicted in the judgment of sense.

Like Psalm xxxiv., this concludes with a supplementary verse beginning with Pe, a letter already represented in the acrostic scheme. This may be a later addition, for liturgical purposes.

PSALM XXVI.

1 Judge me, Jehovah, for I—in my integrity do I walk,
And in Jehovah do I trust unwavering.
2 Test me, Jehovah, and try me,
My reins and my heart.
3 For Thy loving-kindness is before my eyes,
And I walk in Thy troth.

4 I sit not with men of vanity,
And with those who mask themselves do I not go.
5 I hate the congregation of evil-doers,
And with the wicked I do not sit.

6 I will wash my hands in innocence,
That I may compass Thine altar, Jehovah,
7 To cause the voice of praise to be heard,
And to tell forth all Thy wonders.

8 Jehovah, I love the shelter of Thy house,
And the place of the dwelling of Thy glory.
9 Take not away with sinners my soul,
Nor with men of blood my life,
10 In whose hands is outrage,
And their right hand is full of bribery.

11 But I—in my integrity will I walk;
Redeem me, and be gracious to me.
12 My foot stands on level ground;
In the congregations will I bless Jehovah.

THE image of "the way" which is characteristic of Psalm xxv. reappears in a modified form in this psalm, which speaks of "walking in integrity" and truth and of "feet standing in an even place." Other resemblances to the preceding psalm are the use of

"redeem," "be merciful"; the references to God's loving-kindness and truth, in which the psalmist walks, and to his own integrity. These similarities may or may not indicate common authorship, but probably guided the compilers in placing the psalm here. It has not clear marks of date or of the writer's circumstances. Its two ground tones are profession of integrity and of revulsion from the society of the wicked and prayer for vindication of innocence by the fact of deliverance. The verses are usually grouped in couples, but with some irregularity.

The two key-notes are both struck in the first group of three verses, in which vv. 2 and 3 are substantially an expansion of ver. 1. The prayer, "Judge me," asks for a Divine act of deliverance based upon a Divine recognition of the psalmist's sincerity and unwavering trust. Both the prayer and its ground are startling. It grates upon ears accustomed to the tone of the New Testament that a suppliant should allege his single-eyed simplicity and steadfast faith as pleas with God, and the strange tone sounds on through the whole psalm. The threefold prayer in ver. 2 courts Divine scrutiny, as conscious of innocence, and bares the inmost recesses of affection and impulse for testing, proving by circumstances, and smelting by any fire. The psalmist is ready for the ordeal, because he has kept God's "loving-kindness" steadily in sight through all the glamour of earthly brightnesses, and his outward life has been all, as it were, transacted in the sphere of God's truthfulness; *i.e.*, the inward contemplation of His mercy and faithfulness has been the active principle of his life. Such self-consciousness is strange enough to us, but, strange as it is, it cannot fairly be stigmatised as Pharisaic self-righteousness.

The psalmist knows that all goodness comes from God, and he clings to God in childlike trust. The humblest Christian heart might venture in similar language to declare its recoil from evil-doers and its deepest spring of action as being trust. Such professions are not inconsistent with consciousness of sin, which is, in fact, often associated with them in other psalms (xxv. 20, 21, and vii. 11, 18). They do indicate a lower stage of religious development, a less keen sense of sinfulness and of sins, a less clear recognition of the worthlessness before God of all man's goodness, than belong to Christian feeling. The same language when spoken at one stage of revelation may be childlike and lowly, and be swelling arrogance and self-righteous self-ignorance, if spoken at another.

Such high and sweet communion cannot but breed profound distaste for the society of evil-doers. The eyes which have God's loving-kindness ever before them are endowed with penetrative clearness of vision into the true hollowness of most of the objects pursued by men, and with a terrible sagacity which detects hypocrisy and shams. Association with such men is necessary, else we must needs go out of the world, and leaven must be in contact with dough in order to do its transforming work; but it is impossible for a man whose heart is truly in touch with God not to feel ill at ease when brought into contact with those who have no share in his deepest convictions and emotions. "Men of vanity" is a general designation for the ungodly, pronouncing on every such life the sentence that it is devoted to empty unrealities and partakes of the nature of that to which it is given up. One who has Jehovah's loving-kindness before his eyes cannot "sit" with such men in friendly association, as if

sharing their ways of thinking, nor "go" with them in their course of conduct. "Those who mask themselves" are another class, namely hypocrites who conceal their pursuit of vanity under the show of religion. The psalmist's revulsion is intensified in ver. 5 into "hate," because the evil-doers and sinners spoken of there are of a deeper tint of blackness, and are banded together in a "congregation," the opposite and parody of the assemblies of the righteous, whom he feels to be his kindred. No doubt separateness from evil-doers is but part of a godly man's duty, and has often been exaggerated into selfish withdrawal from a world which needs good men's presence all the more the worse it is; but it *is* a part of his duty, and "Come out from among them and be separate" is not yet an abrogated command. No man will ever mingle with "men of vanity," so as to draw them from the shadows of earth to the substance in God, unless his loving association with them rests on profound revulsion from their principles of action. None comes so near to sinful men as the sinless Christ; and if He had not been ever "separate from sinners," He would never have been near enough to redeem them. We may safely imitate His free companionship, which earned Him His glorious name of their Friend, if we imitate His remoteness from their evil.

From the uncongenial companionship of the wicked the psalmist's yearnings instinctively turn to his heart's home, the sanctuary. The more a man feels out of sympathy with a godless world, the more longingly he presses into the depths of communion with God; and, conversely, the more he feels at home in still communion, the more does the tumult of sense-bound crowds grate on his soul. The psalmist, then, in the next group of

verses (6, 7), opposes access to the house of God and the solemn joy of thankful praises sounding there to the loathed consorting with evil. He will not sit with men of vanity because he will enter the sanctuary. Outward participation in its worship may be included in his vows and wishes, but the tone of the verses rather points to a symbolical use of the externalities of ritual. Cleansing the hands alludes to priestly lustration; compassing the altar is not known to have been a Jewish practice, and probably is to be taken as simply a picturesque way of describing himself as one of the joyous circle of worshippers; the sacrifice is praise. The psalmist rises to the height of the true Israelite's priestly vocation, and ritual has become transparent to him. None the less may he have clung to the outwardnesses of ceremonial worship, because he apprehended them in their highest significance and had learned that the qualification of the worshipper was purity, and the best offering praise. Well for those who, like him, are driven to the sanctuary by the revulsion from vanities and from those who pursue them!

Ver. 8 is closely connected with the two preceding, but is perhaps best united with the following verse, as being the ground of the prayer there. Hate of the congregation of evil-doers has love to God's house for its complement or foundation. The measure of attachment is that of detachment. The designations of the sanctuary in ver. 8 show the aspects in which it drew the psalmist's love. It was "the shelter of Thy house," where he could hide himself from the strife of tongues and escape the pain of herding with evil-doers; it was "the place of the dwelling of Thy glory," the abode of that symbol of Divine presence which flamed between the cherubim

and lit the darkness of the innermost shrine. Because the singer felt his true home to be there, he prayed that his soul might not be gathered with sinners, *i.e.* that he might not be involved in their fate. He has had no fellowship with them in their evil, and therefore he asks that he may be separate from them in their punishment. To "gather the soul" is equivalent to taking away the life. God's judgments sort out characters and bring like to like, as the tares are bound in bundles or as, with so different a purpose, Christ made the multitudes sit down by companies on the green sward. General judgments are not indiscriminate. The prayer of the psalmist may not have looked beyond exemption from calamities or from death, but the essence of the faith which it expresses is eternally true: that distinction of attitude towards God and goodness must secure distinction of lot, even though external circumstances are identical. The same things are not the same to men so profoundly different. The picture of the evil-doers from whom the psalmist recoils is darker in these last verses than before. It is evidently a portrait and points to a state of society in which violence, outrage, and corruption were rampant. The psalmist washed his hands in innocency, but these men had violence and bribes in theirs. They were therefore persons in authority, prostituting justice. The description fits too many periods too well to give a clue to the date of the psalm.

Once more the consciousness of difference and the resolve not to be like such men break forth in the closing couple of verses. The psalm began with the profession that he had walked in his integrity; it ends with the vow that he will. It had begun with the prayer "Judge me"; it ends with the expansion of it into "Redeem me"—*i.e.*, from existing dangers, from

evil-doers, or from their fate—and "Be gracious unto me," the positive side of the same petition. He who purposes to walk uprightly has the right to expect God's delivering and giving hand to be extended to him. The resolve to walk uprightly unaccompanied with the prayer for that hand to hold up is as rash as the prayer without the resolve is vain. But if these two go together, quiet confidence will steal into the heart; and though there be no change in circumstances, the mood of mind will be so soothed and lightened that the suppliant will feel that he has suddenly emerged from the steep gorge where he had been struggling and shut up, and stands on the level ground of the "shining table-lands, whereof our God Himself is sun and moon." Such peaceful foretaste of coming security is the forerunner which visits the faithful heart. Gladdened by it, the psalmist is sure that his desire of compassing God's altar with praise will be fulfilled, and that, instead of compulsory association with the "congregation of evil-doers," he will bless Jehovah "in the congregations" where His name is loved and find himself among those who, like himself, delight in His praise.

PSALM XXVII.

1 Jehovah is my light and my salvation; whom should I fear?
Jehovah is the fortress of my life; for whom should I tremble?
2 When evil-doers drew near against me, to devour my flesh,
My oppressors and my foes, they stumbled and fell.
3 Though a host encamp against me,
My heart fears not;
Though war rises against me,
Even then am I confident.

4 One thing have I asked from Jehovah; that will I seek:
That I may dwell in the house of Jehovah all the days of my life,
To gaze upon the pleasantness of Jehovah and to meditate in His palace.
5 For He will hide me in a bower in the day of evil;
He will secrete me in the secret of His tent;
On a rock will He lift me.
6 And now shall my head be lifted above my foes around me,
And I will sacrifice in His tent sacrifices of joy;
I will sing and I will harp to Jehovah.

7 Hear, Jehovah, when I cry with my voice;
And be gracious to me, and answer me.
8 To Thee hath my heart said, (when Thou saidst) "Seek ye my face";
That face of Thine, Jehovah, will I seek.
9 Hide not Thy face from me:
Repulse not Thy servant in anger;
My help Thou hast been:
Cast me not off, and forsake me not, O God of my salvation
10 For my father and my mother have forsaken me;
But Jehovah will take me up.

11 Show me, Jehovah, Thy way,
And lead me in a level path, because of those who lie in wait for me.

12 Give me not up to the desire of my oppressors,
For false witnesses have risen against me, and such as breathe out violence.
13 If I had not believed that I should see the goodness of Jehovah
In the land of the living——!
14 Wait on Jehovah;
Be strong, and let thine heart take courage, and wait on Jehovah.

THE hypothesis that two originally distinct psalms or fragments are here blended has much in its favour. The rhythm and style of the latter half (ver. 7 to end) are strikingly unlike those of the former part, and the contrast of feeling is equally marked, and is in the opposite direction from that which is usual, since it drops from exultant faith to at least plaintive, if not anxious, petition. But while the phenomena are plain and remarkable, they do not seem to demand the separation suggested. Form and rhythm are elastic in the poet's hands, and change in correspondence with his change of mood. The flowing melody of the earlier part is the natural expression of its sunny confidence, and the harsher strains of the later verses fit no less well their contents. Why may not the key change to a minor, and yet the voice be the same? The fall from jubilant to suppliant faith is not unexampled in other psalms (cf. ix. and xxv.), nor in itself unnatural. Dangers, which for a moment cease to press, do recur, however real the victory over fear has been, and in this recrudescence of the consciousness of peril, which yet does not loosen, but tighten, the grasp of faith, this ancient singer speaks the universal experience; and his song becomes more precious and more fitted for all lips than if it had been unmingled triumph. One can better understand the original author passing in swift transition from the one to the other tone, than a later editor deliberately appending to a pure burst of joyous

faith and aspiration a tag which flattened it. The more unlike the two halves are, the less probable is it that their union is owing to any but the author of both. The fire of the original inspiration could fuse them into homogeneousness; it is scarcely possible that a mechanical patcher should have done so. If, then, we take the psalm as a whole, it gives a picture of the transitions of a trustful soul surrounded by dangers, in which all such souls may recognise their own likeness.

The first half (vv. 1–6) is the exultant song of soaring faith. But even in it there sounds an undertone. The very refusal to be afraid glances sideways at outstanding causes for fear. The very names of Jehovah as "Light, Salvation," "the Stronghold of my life," imply darkness, danger, and besetting foes. The resolve to keep alight the fire of courage and confidence in the face of encamping foes and rising wars is much too energetic to be mere hypothetical courage. The hopes of safety in Jehovah's tent, of a firm standing on a rock, and of the head being lifted above surrounding foes are not the hopes of a man at ease, but of one threatened on all sides, and triumphant only because he clasps Jehovah's hand. The first words of the psalm carry it all in germ. By a noble dead-lift of confidence, the singer turns from foes and fears to stay himself on Jehovah, his light and salvation, and then, in the strength of that assurance, bids back his rising fears to their dens. "I will trust, and not be afraid," confesses the presence of fear, and, like our psalm, unveils the only reasonable counteraction of it in the contemplation of what God is. There is much to fear unless He is our light, and they who will not begin with the psalmist's confidence have no right to repeat his courage.

To a devout man the past is eloquent with reasons for confidence, and in ver. 2 the psalm points to a past fact. The stumbling and falling of former foes, who came open-mouthed at him, is not a hypothetical case, but a bit of autobiography, which lives to nourish present confidence. It is worth notice that the language employed has remarkable correspondence with that used in the story of David's fight with Goliath. There the same word as here is twice employed to describe the Philistine's advance (1 Sam. xvii. 41, 48). Goliath's vaunt, "I will give thy flesh to the fowls of the air and to the beasts of the field," may have supplied the mould for the expression here, and the fall of the giant, with his face to the earth and the smooth stone in his brain, is narrated with the same word as occurs in the psalm. It might well be that when David was a fugitive before Saul the remembrance of his victory over Goliath should have cheered him, just as that of his earlier prowess against bear and lion heartened him to face the Philistine bully; and such recollections would be all the more natural since jealousy of the fame that came to him from that feat had set the first light to Saul's hatred. Ver. 3 is not to be left swinging *in vacuo*, a cheap vow of courage in hypothetical danger. The supposed case is actual fact, and the expressions of trust are not only assertions for the future, but statements of the present temper of the psalmist: "I *do* not fear; I *am* confident."

The confidence of ver. 3 is rested not only on Jehovah's past acts, but on the psalmist's past and present set of soul towards Him. That seems to be the connecting link between vv. 1–3 and 4–6. Such desire, the psalmist is sure, cannot but be answered, and in the answer all safety is included. The purest longing

after God, as the deepest, most fixed yearning of a heart, was never more nobly expressed. Clearly the terms forbid the limitation of meaning to mere external presence in a material sanctuary. "All the days of my life" points to a continuance inward and capable of accomplishment, wherever the body may be. The exclusiveness and continuity of the longing, as well as the gaze on God which is its true object, are incapable of the lower meaning, while, no doubt, the externals of worship supply the mould into which these longings are poured. But what the psalmist wants is what the devout soul in all ages and stages has wanted: the abiding consciousness of the Divine presence; and the prime good which makes that presence so infinitely and exclusively desirable to him is the good which draws all such souls in yearning, namely the vision of God. The lifelong persistence and exclusiveness of the desire are such as all must cherish if they are to receive its fruition. Blessed are they who are delivered from the misery of multiplied and transient aims which break life into fragments by steadfastly and continually following one great desire, which binds all the days each to each, and in its single simplicity encloses and hallows and unifies the else distracting manifoldness! That life is filled with light, however it may be ringed round with darkness, which has the perpetual vision of God, who is its light. Very beautifully does the psalm describe the occupation of God's guest as "gazing upon the pleasantness of Jehovah.' In that expression the construction of the verb with a preposition implies a steadfast and penetrating contemplation, and the word rendered "beauty" or "pleasantness" may mean "friendliness," but is perhaps better taken in a more general meaning, as

equivalent to the whole gathered delightsomeness of the Divine character, the supremely fair and sweet. "To inquire" may be rendered "to consider"; but the rendering "meditate [or contemplate] in" is better, as the palace would scarcely be a worthy object of consideration; and it is natural that the gaze on the goodness of Jehovah should be followed by loving meditation on what that earnest look had seen. The two acts complete the joyful employment of a soul communing with God: first perceiving and then reflecting upon His uncreated beauty of goodness.

Such intimacy of communion brings security from external dangers. The guest has a claim for protection. And that is a subsidiary reason for the psalmist's desire as well as a ground of his confidence. Therefore the assurance of ver. 5 follows the longing of ver. 4. "A pavilion," as the Hebrew text reads, has been needlessly corrected in the margin into "His pavilion" (A.V.). "It is not God's dwelling, as the following 'tent' is, but a booth . . . as an image of protection from heat and inclemency of weather (Isa. iv. 6)" (Hupfeld). God's dwelling is a "tent," where He will shelter His guests. The privilege of asylum is theirs. Then, with a swift change of figure, the psalmist expresses the same idea of security by elevation on a rock, possibly conceiving the tent as pitched there. The reality of all is that communion with God secures from perils and enemies, an eternal truth, if the true meaning of security is grasped. Borne up by such thoughts, the singer feels himself lifted clear above the reach of surrounding foes, and, with the triumphant "now" of ver. 6, stretches out his hand to bring future deliverance into the midst of present distress. Faith can blend the seasons, and transport June and its roses

into December's snows. Deliverance suggests thankfulness to a true heart, and its anticipation calls out prophetic "songs in the night."

But the very brightness of the prospect recalls the stern reality of present need, and the firmest faith cannot keep on the wing continually. In the first part of the psalm it sings and soars; in the second the note is less jubilant, and it sings and sinks; but in both it is faith. Prayer for deliverance is as really the voice of faith as triumph in the assurance of deliverance is, and he who sees his foes and yet "believes to see the goodness of Jehovah" is not far below him who gazes only on the beauty of the Lord. There is a parallelism between the two halves of the psalm worth noting. In the former part the psalmist's confidence reposed on the two facts of past deliverance and of his past and continuous "seeking after" the one good; in the second his prayers repose on the same two grounds, which occur in inverted order. "That will I seek after" (ver. 4), is echoed by "Thy face will I seek" (ver. 8). To seek the face is the same substantially as to desire to "gaze on the pleasantness of Jehovah." The past experience of the fall of foes (ver. 2) is repeated in "Thou hast been my help." On these two pleas the prayer in which faith speaks itself founds. The former is urged in vv. 8 and 9 with some harshness of construction, which is smoothed over, rightly as regards meaning, in the A.V. and R.V. But the very brokenness of the sentence adds to the earnestness of the prayer: "To Thee my heart has said, Seek ye my face; Thy face, Jehovah, will I seek." The answering heart repeats the invitation which gave it courage to seek before it responds with its resolve. The insertion of some such phrase as "in answer to Thy word" before "seek ye" helps the sense in a

translation, but mars the vigour of the original. The invitation is not quoted from any Scripture, but is the summary of the meaning of all God's self-revelation. He is ever saying, "Seek ye my face." Therefore He cannot but show it to a man who takes Him at His word and pleads that word as the warrant for his petition. "I have never said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye my face in vain." The consistency of the Divine character ensures His satisfying the desires which He has implanted. He will neither stultify Himself nor tantalise men by setting them on quests which end in disappointment. In a similar manner, the psalm urges the familiar argument from God's past, which reposes on the confidence of unalterable grace and inexhaustible resources. The psalmist had no cold abstract doctrine of immutability as a Divine attribute. His conception was intensely practical. Since God has helped in the past, He will help in the future, because He is God, and because He is "the God of my salvation." He cannot reverse His action nor stay His hand until His dealings with His servants have vindicated that name by completing the process to which it binds Him.

The prayer "Forsake me not" is based upon a remarkable ground in ver. 10: "For my father and my mother have forsaken me." That seems a singular plea for a mature man, who has a considerably varied experience of life behind him, to urge. It is generally explained as a proverbial expression, meaning no more than the frequent complaints in the Psalter of desertion by friends and lovers. Cheyne (Commentary in loc.) sees in it a clear indication that the speaker is the afflicted nation, comparing itself to a sobbing child deserted by its parents. But it is at least noteworthy that, when David

was hard pressed at Adullam, he bestowed his father and mother for safety with the king of Moab (1 Sam. xxi. 3, 4). It is objected that this was not their "forsaking" him, but it was, at least, their "leaving" him, and might well add an imaginative pang as well as a real loss to the fugitive. So specific a statement as that of the psalm can scarcely be weakened down into proverb or metaphor. The allusion may be undiscoverable, but the words sound uncommonly like the assertion of a fact, and the fact referred to is the only known one which in any degree fits them.

The general petitions of vv. 7–10 become more specific as the song nears its close. As in Psalm xxv., guidance and protection are the psalmist's needs now. The analogy of other psalms suggests an ethical meaning for "the plain path" of ver. 11; and that signification, rather than that of a safe road, is to be preferred, for the sake of preserving a difference between this and the following prayer for deliverance. The figures of his enemies stand out more threateningly than before (ver. 12). Is that all his gain from his prayer? Is it not a faint-hearted descent from ver. 6, where, from the height of his Divine security, he looked down on them far below, and unable to reach him? Now they have "risen up," and he has dropped down among them. But such changes of mood are not inconsistent with unchanged faith, if only the gaze which discerns the precipice at either side is not turned away from the goal ahead and above, nor from Him who holds up His servant. The effect of that clearer sight of the enemies is very beautifully given in the abrupt half-sentence of ver. 13: "If I had not believed to see the goodness of Jehovah in the land of the living!" As he thinks of his foes, he breaks into an exclamation, which he leaves

unfinished. The omission is easy to supply. He would have been their victim but for his faith. The broken words tell of his recoil from the terrible possibility forced on him by the sight of the formidable enemies. Well for us if we are but driven the closer to God, in conscious helplessness, by the sight of dangers and antagonisms! Faith does not falter, though it is keenly conscious of difficulties. It is not preserved by ignoring facts, but should be by them impelled to clasp God more firmly as its only safety.

So the psalm goes back to the major key at last, and in the closing verse prayer passes into self-encouragement. The heart that spoke to God now speaks to itself. Faith exhorts sense and soul to "wait on Jehovah." The self-communing of the psalmist, beginning with exultant confidence and merging into prayer thrilled with consciousness of need and of weakness, closes with bracing him up to courage, which is not presumption, because it is the fruit of waiting on the Lord. He who thus keeps his heart in touch with God will be able to obey the ancient command, which had rung so long before in the ears of Joshua in the plains of Jericho and is never out of date, "Be strong and of a good courage"; and none but those who wait on the Lord will be at once conscious of weakness and filled with strength, aware of the foes and bold to meet them.

PSALM XXVIII.

1 Unto Thee, Jehovah, I cry;
My Rock, be not deaf to me,
Lest Thou be silent to me,
And I become as those who go down to the pit.
2 Hear the voice of my supplications in my crying to Thee for help,
In my lifting my hands to Thy holy shrine.

3 Drag me not away with wicked men, and with workers of iniquity,
Speaking peace with their neighbours,
And evil is in their hearts.
4 Give them according to their doings and according to the evil of their deeds;
According to the work of their hands give them;
Return their desert to them.
5 For they pay no heed to the doings of Jehovah
Nor to the work of His hands;
He shall cast them down, and not build them up.

6 Blessed be Jehovah,
For He has heard the voice of my supplications.
7 Jehovah is my fortress and my shield;
In Him has my heart trusted, and I am helped;
So my heart leaps [for joy], and by my song will I praise Him.

8 Jehovah is their strength (or the strength of His people),
And a fortress of salvation for His anointed is He.
9 Save Thy people, and bless Thine inheritance,
And shepherd them, and carry them even for evermore.

THE unquestionable resemblances to Psalm xxvi. scarcely require that this should be considered its companion. The differences are as obvious as the likenesses. While the prayer "Draw me not away with the wicked" and the characterisation of these

are alike in both, the further emphatic prayer for retribution here and the closing half of this psalm have nothing corresponding to them in the other. This psalm is built on the familiar plan of groups of two verses each, with the exception that the prayer, which is its centre, runs over into three. The course of thought is as familiar as the structure. Invocation is followed by petition, and that by exultant anticipation of the answer as already given; and all closes with wider petitions for the whole people.

Vv. 1, 2, are a prelude to the prayer proper, bespeaking the Divine acceptance of it, on the double ground of the psalmist's helplessness apart from God's help and of his outstretched hands appealing to God enthroned above the mercy-seat. He is in such straits that, unless his prayer brings an answer in act, he must sink into the pit of Sheol, and be made like those that lie huddled there in its darkness. On the edge of the slippery slope, he stretches out his hands toward the innermost sanctuary (for so the word rendered, by a mistaken etymology, "oracle" means). He beseeches God to hear, and blends the two figures of deafness and silence as both meaning the withholding of help. Jehovah seems deaf when prayer is unanswered, and is silent when He does not speak in deliverance. This prelude of invocation throbs with earnestness, and sets the pattern for suppliants, teaching them how to quicken their own desires as well as how to appeal to God by breathing to Him their consciousness that only His hand can keep them from sliding down into death.

The prayer itself (vv. 3–5) touches lightly on the petition that the psalmist may be delivered from the fate of the wicked, and then launches out into indignant description of their practices and solemn invocation of

retribution upon them. "Drag away" is parallel with, but stronger than, "Gather not" in xxvi. 9. Commentators quote Job xxiv. 22, where the word is used of God's dragging the mighty out of life by His power, as a struggling criminal is haled to the scaffold. The shuddering recoil from the fate of the wicked is accompanied with vehement loathing of their practices. A man who keeps his heart in touch with God cannot but shrink, as from a pestilence, from complicity with evil, and the depth of his hearty hatred of it is the measure of his right to ask that he may not share in the ruin it must bring, since God is righteous. One type of evil-doers is the object of the psalmist's special abhorrence: false friends with smooth tongues and daggers in their sleeves, the "dissemblers" of Psalm xxvi.; but he passes to the more general characterisation of the class, in his terrible prayer for retribution, in vv. 4, 5. The sin of sins, from which all specific acts of evil flow, is blindness to God's "deeds" and to "the work of His hands," His acts both of mercy and of judgment. Practical atheism, the indifference which looks upon nature, history, and self, and sees no signs of a mighty hand tender, pure, and strong, ever active in them all, will surely lead the purblind "Agnostics" to do "works of their hands" which, for lack of reference to Him, fail to conform to the highest ideal and draw down righteous judgment. But the blindness to God's work here meant is that of an averted will rather than that of mistaken understanding, and from the stem of such a thorn the grapes of holy living cannot be gathered. Therefore the psalmist is but putting into words the necessary result of such lives when from suppliant he becomes prophet, and declares that "He shall cast them down, and not build them up." The

stern tone of this prayer marks it as belonging to the older type of religion, and its dissimilarity to the New Testament teaching is not to be slurred over. No doubt the element of personal enmity is all but absent, but it is not the prayer which those who have heard "Father, forgive them," are to copy. Yet, on the other hand, the wholesome abhorrence of evil, the solemn certitude that sin is death, the desire that it may cease from the world, and the lowly petition that it may not drag us into fatal associations are all to be preserved in Christian feeling, while softened by the light that falls from Calvary.

As in many psalms, the faith which prays passes at once into the faith which possesses. This man, when he "stood praying, believed that he had what he asked," and, so believing, had it. There was no change in circumstances, but he was changed. There is no fear of going down into the pit now, and the rabble of evil-doers have disappeared. This is the blessing which every true suppliant may bear away from the throne, the peace which passeth understanding, the sure pledge of the Divine act which answers prayer. It is the first gentle ripple of the incoming tide; high water is sure to come at the due hour. So the psalmist is exuberant and happily tautological in telling how his trusting heart has become a leaping heart, and help has been flashed back from heaven as swiftly as his prayer had travelled thither.

The closing strophe (vv. 8, 9) is but loosely connected with the body of the psalm except on one supposition. What if the singer were king over Israel, and if the dangers threatening him were public perils? That would explain the else singular attachment of intercession for Israel to so intensely personal a suppli-

cation. It is most natural that God's "anointed," who has been asking deliverance for himself, should widen his petitions to take in that flock of which he was but the under-shepherd, and should devolve the shepherding and carrying of it on the Divine Shepherd-King, of whom he was the shadowy representative. The addition of one letter changes "their" in ver. 8 into "to His people," a reading which has the support of the LXX. and of some manuscripts and versions and is recommended by its congruity with the context. Cheyne's suggestion that "His anointed" is the high-priest is only conjecture. The reference of the expression to the king who is also the psalmist preserves the unity of the psalm. The Christian reader cannot but think of the true King and Intercessor, whose great prayer before His passion began, like our psalm, with petitions for Himself, but passed into supplication for His little flock and for all the unnumbered millions "who should believe on" Him "through their word."

PSALM XXIX

1 Give to Jehovah, ye sons of God,
Give to Jehovah glory and strength.
2 Give to Jehovah the glory of His name;
Bow down to Jehovah in holy attire.

3 The voice of Jehovah is upon the waters;
The God of glory thunders;
Jehovah is on many waters.
4 The voice of Jehovah is with power;
The voice of Jehovah is with majesty.

5 The voice of Jehovah shivers the cedars;
Yea, Jehovah shivers the cedars of Lebanon,
6 And makes them leap like a calf,
Lebanon and Sirion like a young wild ox.
7 The voice of Jehovah hews out flames of fire.

8 The voice of Jehovah shakes the wilderness;
Jehovah shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.
9 The voice of Jehovah makes the hinds calve, and strips the woods;
And in His palace every one is saying, Glory!

10 Jehovah sat enthroned for the Flood;
And Jehovah sits King for ever.
11 Jehovah will give strength to His people;
Jehovah will bless His people with peace.

THE core of this psalm is the magnificent description of the thunderstorm rolling over the whole length of the land. That picture is framed by two verses of introduction and two of conclusion, which are connected, inasmuch as the one deals with the "glory to God in the highest" which is the echo of the tempest in angels' praises, and the other with the "peace on earth" in which its thunders die away.

The invocation in vv. 1, 2, is addressed to angels, whatever may be the exact rendering of the remarkable title by which they are summoned in ver. 1. It is all but unique, and the only other instance of its use (Psalm lxxxix. 6) establishes its meaning, since "holy ones" is there given as synonymous in the verses preceding and following. The most probable explanation of the peculiar phrase (B'ne Elim) is that of Gesenius, Ewald, Delitzsch, and Riehm in his edition of Hupfeld's Commentary: that it is a double plural, both members of the compound phrase being inflected. Similarly "mighty men of valour" (1 Chron. vii. 5) has the second noun in the plural. This seems more probable than the rendering "sons of the gods." The psalmist summons these lofty beings to "give" glory and strength to Jehovah; that is, to ascribe to Him the attributes manifested in His acts, or, as ver. 2 puts it, "the glory of His name," *i.e.*, belonging to His character as thus revealed. The worship of earth is regarded as a type of that of heaven, and as here, so there, they who bow before Him are to be clothed in "holy attire." The thought underlying this ringing summons is that even angels learn the character of God from the exhibitions of His power in the Creation, and as they sang together for joy at first, still attend its manifestations with adoration. The contrast of their praise with the tumult and terror on earth, while the thunder growls in the sky, is surely not unintended. It suggests the different aspects of God's dread deeds as seen by them and by men, and carries a tacit lesson true of all calamities and convulsions. The thunder-cloud hangs boding in its piled blue blackness to those who from beneath watch the slow crumbling away of its torn edges and the ominous movements in its sullen heart or hear the crashes from

its depths, but, seen from above, it is transfigured by the light that falls on its upper surface; and it stretches placid before the throne, like the sea of glass mingled with fire. Whatever may be earth's terror, heaven's echo of God's thunders is praise.

Then the storm bursts. We can hear it rolling in the short periods, mostly uniform in structure and grouped in verses of two clauses each, the second of which echoes the first, like the long-drawn roll that pauses, slackens, and yet persists. Seven times "the voice of Jehovah" is heard, like the apocalyptic "seven thunders before the throne." The poet's eye travels with the swift tempest, and his picture is full of motion, sweeping from the waters above the firmament to earth and from the northern boundary of the land to the far south. First we hear the mutterings in the sky (ver. 3). If we understood "the waters" as meaning the Mediterranean, we should have the picture of the storm working up from the sea; but it is better to take the expression as referring to the super-terrestrial reservoirs or the rain flood stored in the thunder-clouds. Up there the peals roll before their fury shakes the earth. It was not enough in the poet's mind to call the thunder the voice of Jehovah, but it must be brought into still closer connection with Him by the plain statement that it is He who "thunders" and who rides on the storm-clouds as they hurry across the sky. To catch tones of a Divine voice, full of power and majesty, in a noise so entirely explicable as a thunderclap, is, no doubt, unscientific; but the Hebrew contemplation of nature is occupied with another set of ideas than scientific, and is entirely unaffected by these. The psalmist had no notion of the physical cause of thunder, but there is no reason why a man who

can make as much electricity as he wants by the grinding of a dynamo and then use it to carry his trivial messages should not repeat the psalmist's devout assertion. We can assimilate all that physicists can tell us, and then, passing into another region, can hear Jehovah speaking in thunder. The psalm begins where science leaves off.

While the psalmist speaks the swift tempest has come down with a roar and a crash on the northern mountains, and Lebanon and "Sirion" (a Sidonian name for Hermon) reel, and the firm-boled, stately cedars are shivered. The structure of the verses already noticed, in which the second clause reduplicates, with some specialising, the thought of the first, makes it probable that in ver. 6 *a* the mountains, and not the cedars, are meant by "them." The trees are broken; the mountains shake. An emendation has been proposed, by which "Lebanon" should be transferred from ver. 5 to ver. 6 and substituted for "them" so as to bring out this meaning more smoothly, but the roughness of putting the pronoun in the first clause and the nouns to which it refers in the second is not so considerable as to require the change. The image of the mountains "skipping" sounds exaggerated to Western ears, but is not infrequent in Scripture, and in the present instance is simply a strong way of expressing the violence of the storm, which seems even to shake the steadfast mountains that keep guard over the furthest borders of the land. Nor are we to forget that here there may be some hint of a parable in nature. The heights are thunder-smitten; the valleys are safe. "The day of the Lord shall be upon all the cedars of Lebanon that are high and lifted up, . . . and upon all the high mountains" (Isa. ii. 13, 14)

The two-claused verses are interrupted by one of a single clause (ver. 7), the brevity of which vividly suggests the suddenness and speed of the flash: "The voice of Jehovah cleaves [or, hews out] fire flames." The thunder is conceived of as the principal phenomenon and as creating the lightning, as if it hewed out the flash from the dark mass of cloud. A corrected accentuation of this short verse divides it into three parts, perhaps representing the triple zigzag; but in any case the one solitary, sudden fork, blazing fiercely for a moment and then swallowed up in the gloom, is marvellously given. It is further to be noted that this single lightning gleam parts the description of the storm into two, the former part painting it as in the north, the latter as in the extreme south. It has swept over the whole length of the land, while we have been watching the flash. Now it is rolling over the wide plain of the southern desert. The precise position of Kadesh is keenly debated, but it was certainly in the eastern part of the desert region on the southern border. It, too, shakes, low-lying as it is; and far and wide over its uninhabited levels the tempest ranges. Its effects there are variously understood. The parallelism of clauses and the fact that nowhere else in the picture is animal life introduced give great probability to the very slight alteration required in ver. 9 *a*, in order to yield the rendering "pierces the oaks" (Cheyne), instead of "makes the hinds calve" which harmonises admirably with the next clause; but, on the other hand, the premature dropping of the young of wild animals from fear is said to be an authentic fact, and gives a defensible trait to the picture, which is perhaps none the less striking for the introduction of one small piece of animated nature. In any case the

next clause paints the dishevelled forest trees, with scarred bark, broken boughs, and strewn leaves, after the fierce roar and flash, wind and rain, have swept over them. The southern border must have been very unlike its present self, or the poet's thoughts must have travelled eastwards, among the oaks on the other side of the Arabah, if the local colouring of ver. 9 is correct.

While tumult of storm and crash of thunder have been raging and rolling below, the singer hears "a deeper voice across the storm," the songs of the "sons of God" in the temple palace above, chanting the praise to which he had summoned them. "In His temple every one is saying, Glory!" That is the issue of all storms. The clear eyes of the angels see, and their "loud uplifted trumpets" celebrate, the lustrous self-manifestation of Jehovah, who rides upon the storm, and makes the rush of the thunder minister to the fruitfulness of earth.

But what of the effects down here? The concluding strophe (vv. 10, 11) tells. Its general sense is clear, though the first clause of ver. 10 is ambiguous. The source of the difficulty in rendering is twofold. The preposition may mean "for"— *i.e.*, in order to bring about—or, according to some, "on," or "above," or "at." The word rendered "flood" is only used elsewhere in reference to the Noachic deluge, and here has the definite article, which is most naturally explained as fixing the reference to that event; but it has been objected that the allusion would be far-fetched and out of place, and therefore the rendering "rain-storm" has been suggested. In the absence of any instance of the word's being used for anything but the Deluge, it is safest to retain that meaning here. There must, however, be combined with that rendering an allusion to the

torrents of thunder rain, which closed the thunderstorm. These could scarcely be omitted. They remind the singer of the downpour that drowned the world, and his thought is that just as Jehovah "sat"—*i.e.*, solemnly took His place as King and Judge—in order to execute that act of retribution, so, in all subsequent smaller acts of an analogous nature, He "will sit enthroned for ever." The supremacy of Jehovah over all transient tempests and the judicial punitive nature of these are the thoughts which the storm has left with him. It has rolled away; God, who sent it, remains throned above nature and floods: they are His ministers.

And all ends with a sweet, calm word, assuring Jehovah's people of a share in the "strength" which spoke in the thunder, and, better still, of peace. That close is like the brightness of the glistening earth, with freshened air, and birds venturing to sing once more, and a sky of deeper blue, and the spent clouds low and harmless on the horizon. Beethoven has given the same contrast between storm and after-calm in the music of the Pastoral Symphony. Faith can listen to the wildest crashing thunder in quiet confidence that angels are saying, "Glory!" as each peal rolls, and that when the last, low mutterings are hushed, earth will smile the brighter, and deeper peace will fall on trusting hearts.

PSALM XXX.

1 Thee will I exalt, Jehovah, for me hast Thou lifted up,
And not made my foes rejoice over me.
2 Jehovah, my God,
I cried loudly to Thee, and Thou healedst me.
3 Jehovah, Thou hast brought up from Sheol my soul;
Thou hast revived me from among those who descend to the pit

4 e music to Jehovah, ye who are favoured by Him;
And thank His holy Name.
5 For a moment passes in His anger,
A life in His favour;
In the evening comes weeping as a guest,
And at morn [there is] a shout of joy.

6 But I—I said in my security,
I shall not be moved for ever.
7 Jehovah, by Thy favour Thou hadst established strength to my mountain;
Thou didst hide Thy face: I was troubled.

8 To Thee, Jehovah, I cried;
And to the Lord I made supplication.
9 "What profit is in my blood when I descend to the pit?
Can dust thank Thee? can it declare Thy faithfulness?
10 Hear, Jehovah, and be gracious to me;
Jehovah, be my Helper!"

11 Thou didst turn for me my mourning to dancing;
Thou didst unloose my sackcloth and gird me with gladness,
12 To the end that [my] glory should make music to Thee, and not be silent:
Jehovah, my God, for ever will I thank Thee.

THE title of this psalm is apparently a composite, the usual "Psalm of David" having been enlarged by the awkward insertion of "A Song at the Dedication of the House," which probably indicates its later liturgical

use, and not its first destination. Its occasion was evidently a deliverance from grave peril; and, whilst its tone is strikingly inappropriate if it had been composed for the inauguration of temple, tabernacle, or palace, one can understand how the venerable words, which praised Jehovah for swift deliverance from impending destruction, would be felt to fit the circumstances and emotions of the time when the Temple, profaned by the mad acts of Antiochus Epiphanes, was purified and the ceremonial worship restored. Never had Israel seemed nearer going down to the pit; never had deliverance come more suddenly and completely. The intrusive title is best explained as dating from that time and indicating the use then found for the song.

It is an outpouring of thankfulness, and mainly a leaf from the psalmist's autobiography, interrupted only by a call to all who share Jehovah's favour to help the single voice to praise Him (vv. 4, 5). The familiar arrangement in pairs of verses is slightly broken twice, vv. 1–3 being linked together as a kind of prelude and vv. 8–10 as a repetition of the singer's prayer. His praise breaks the barrier of silence and rushes out in a flood. The very first word tells of his exuberant thankfulness, and stands in striking relation to God's act which evokes it. Jehovah has raised him from the very sides of the pit, and therefore what shall he do but exalt Jehovah by praise and commemoration of His deeds? The song runs over in varying expressions for the one deliverance, which is designated as lifting up, disappointment of the malignant joy of enemies, healing, rescue from Sheol and the company who descend thither, by restoration to life. Possibly the prose fact was recovery from sickness, but the metaphor of healing is so frequent that the literal use of the word here is questionable.

As Calvin remarks, sackcloth (ver. 11) is not a sick man's garb. These glad repetitions of the one thought in various forms indicate how deeply moved the singer was, and how lovingly he brooded over his deliverance. A heart truly penetrated with thankfulness delights to turn its blessings round and round, and see how prismatic lights play on their facets, as on revolving diamonds. The same warmth of feeling, which glows in the reiterated celebration of deliverance, impels to the frequent direct mention of Jehovah. Each verse has that name set on it as a seal, and the central one of the three (ver. 2), not content with it only, grasps Him as "my God," manifested as such with renewed and deepened tenderness by the recent fact that "I cried loudly unto Thee, and Thou healedst me." The best result of God's goodness is a firmer assurance of a personal relation to Him. "This is an enclosure of a common without damage: to make God mine own, to find that all that God says is spoken to me" (Donne). The stress of these three verses lies on the reiterated contemplation of God's fresh act of mercy and on the reiterated invocation of His name, which is not vain repetition, but represents distinct acts of consciousness, drawing near to delight the soul in thoughts of Him. The psalmist's vow of praise and former cry for help could not be left out of view, since the one was the condition and the other the issue of deliverance, but they are slightly touched. Such claiming of God for one's own and such absorbing gaze on Him are the intended results of His deeds, the crown of devotion, and the repose of the soul.

True thankfulness is expansive, and joy craves for sympathy. So the psalmist invites other voices to join his song, since he is sure that others there are who have

shared his experience. It has been but one instance of a universal law. He is not the only one whom Jehovah has treated with loving-kindness, and he would fain hear a chorus supporting his solo. Therefore he calls upon "the favoured of God" to swell the praise with harp and voice and to give thanks to His "holy memorial," *i.e.* the name by which His deeds of grace are commemorated. The ground of their praise is the psalmist's own case generalised. A tiny mirror may reflect the sun, and the humblest person's history, devoutly pondered, will yield insight into God's widest dealings. This, then, is what the psalmist had learned in suffering, and wishes to teach in song: that sorrow is transient and joy perennial. A cheerful optimism should be the fruit of experience, and especially of sorrowful experience. The antitheses in ver. 5 are obvious. In the first part of the verse "anger" and "favour" are plainly contrasted, and it is natural to suppose that "a moment" and "life" are so too. The rendering, then, is, "A moment passes in His anger, a life [*i.e.*, a lifetime] in His favour." Sorrow is brief; blessings are long. Thunderstorms occupy but a small part of summer. There is usually less sickness than health in a life. But memory and anticipation beat out sorrow thin, so as to cover a great space. A little solid matter, diffused by currents, will discolour miles of a stream. Unfortunately we have better memories for trouble than for blessing, and the smart of the rose's prickles lasts longer in the flesh than its fragrance in the nostril or its hue in the eye. But the relation of ideas here is not merely that of contrast. May we not say that just as the "moment" is included in the "life," so the "anger" is in the "favour"? Probably that application of the thought was not present

to the psalmist, but it is an Old Testament belief that "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth," and God's anger is the aversion of holy love to its moral opposite. Hence comes the truth that varying and sometimes opposite Divine methods have one motive and one purpose, as the same motion of the earth brings summer and winter in turn. Since the desire of God is to make men partakers of His holiness, the root of chastisement is love, and hours of sorrow are not interruptions of the continuous favour which fills the life.

A like double antithesis moulds the beautiful image of the last clause. Night and morning are contrasted, as are weeping and joy; and the latter contrast is more striking, if it be observed that "joy" is literally a "joyful shout," raised by the voice that had been breaking into audible weeping. The verb used means to lodge for a night, and thus the whole is a picture of two guests, the one coming, sombre-robed, in the hour befitting her, the other, bright-garmented, taking the place of the former, when all things are dewy and sunny, in the morning. The thought may either be that of the substitution of joy for sorrow, or of the transformation of sorrow into joy. No grief lasts in its first bitterness. Recuperative forces begin to tell by slow degrees. "The low beginnings of content" appear. The sharpest-cutting edge is partially blunted by time and what it brings. Tender green drapes every ruin. Sorrow is transformed into something not undeserving of the name of joy. Griefs accepted change their nature. "Your sorrow shall be turned into joy." The man who in the darkness took in the dark guest to sit by his fireside finds in the morning that she is transfigured and her name is Gladness. Rich vintages are gathered on the crumbling lava of the quiescent volcano. Even

for irremediable losses and immedicable griefs, the psalmist's prophecy is true, only that for these "the morning" is beyond earth's dim dawns, and breaks when this night which we call life, and which is wearing thin, is past. In the level light of that sunrise, every raindrop becomes a rainbow, and every sorrow rightly —that is, submissively—borne shall be represented by a special and particular joy.

But the thrilling sense of recent deliverance runs in too strong a current to be long turned aside, even by the thought of others' praise; and the personal element recurs in ver. 6, and persists till the close. This latter part falls into three well-marked minor divisions: the confession of self-confidence, bred of ease and shattered by chastisement, in vv. 6, 7; the prayer of the man startled into renewed dependence in vv. 8–10; and the closing reiterated commemoration of mercies received and vow of thankful praise, which echoes the first part, in vv. 11, 12.

In ver. 6 the psalmist's foolish confidence is emphatically contrasted with the truth won by experience and stated in ver. 5. "The law of God's dealings is so, but I—I thought so and so." The word rendered "prosperity" may be taken as meaning also security. The passage from the one idea to the other is easy, inasmuch as calm days lull men to sleep, and make it hard to believe that "to-morrow shall" not "be as this day." Even devout hearts are apt to count upon the continuance of present good. "Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God." The bottom of the crater of Vesuvius had once great trees growing, the produce of centuries of quiescence. It would be difficult to think, when looking at them, that they would ever be torn up and whirled aloft in flame by a new outburst. While

continual peril and change may not foster remembrance of God, continuous peace is but too apt to lull to forgetfulness of Him. The psalmist was beguiled by comfort into saying precisely what "the wicked said in his heart" (Psalm x. 6). How different may be the meaning of the same words on different lips! The mad arrogance of the godless man's confidence, the error of the good man rocked to sleep by prosperity, and the warranted confidence of a trustful soul are all expressed by the same words; but the last has an addition which changes the whole: "*Because He is at my right hand*, I shall not be moved." The end of the first man's boast can only be destruction; that of the third's faith will certainly be "pleasures for evermore"; that of the second's lapse from dependence is recorded in ver. 7. The sudden crash of his false security is graphically reproduced by the abrupt clauses without connecting particles. It was the "favour" already celebrated which gave the stability which had been abused. Its effect is described in terms of which the general meaning is clear, though the exact rendering is doubtful. "Thou hast [or hadst] established strength to my mountain" is harsh, and the proposed emendation (Hupfeld, Cheyne, etc.), "hast set me on strong mountains," requires the addition to the text of the pronoun. In either case, we have a natural metaphor for prosperity. The emphasis lies on the recognition that it was God's work, a truth which the psalmist had forgotten and had to be taught by the sudden withdrawal of God's countenance, on which followed his own immediate passage from careless security to agitation and alarm. The word "troubled" is that used for Saul's conflicting emotions and despair in the witch's house at Endor, and for the agitation of Joseph's brethren when they heard that the man who

had their lives in his hand was their wronged brother. Thus alarmed and filled with distracting thoughts was the psalmist. "Thou didst hide Thy face," describes his calamities in their source. When the sun goes in, an immediate gloom wraps the land, and the birds cease to sing. But the "trouble" was preferable to "security," for it drove to God. Any tempest which does that is better than calm which beguiles from Him; and, since all His storms are meant to "drive us to His breast," they come from His "favour."

The approach to God is told in vv. 8–10, of which the two latter are a quotation of the prayer then wrung from the psalmist. The ground of this appeal for deliverance from a danger threatening life is as in Hezekiah's prayer (Isa. xxxviii. 18, 19), and reflects the same conception of the state of the dead as Psalm vi. 5. If the suppliant dies, his voice will be missed from the chorus which sings God's praise on earth. "The dust" (*i.e.*, the grave) is a region of silence. Here, where life yielded daily proofs of God's "truth" (*i.e.*, faithfulness), it could be extolled, but there dumb tongues could bring Him no "profit" of praise. The boldness of the thought that God is in some sense advantaged by men's magnifying of His faithfulness, the cheerless gaze into the dark realm, and the implication that to live is desired not only for the sake of life's joys, but in order to show forth God's dealings, are all remarkable. The tone of the prayer indicates the imperfect view of the future life which shadows many psalms, and could only be completed by the historical facts of the Resurrection and Ascension. Concern for the honour of the Old Testament revelation may, in this matter, be stretched to invalidate the distinctive glory of the New, which has "brought life and immortality to light."

With quick transition, corresponding to the swiftness of the answer to prayer, the closing pair of verses tells of the instantaneous change which that answer wrought. As in the earlier metaphor weeping was transformed into joy, here mourning is turned into dancing, and God's hand unties the cord which loosely bound the sackcloth robe, and arrays the mourner in festival attire. The same conception of the sweetness of grateful praise to the ear of God which was presented in the prayer recurs here, where the purpose of God's gifts is regarded as being man's praise. The thought may be construed so as to be repulsive, but its true force is to present God as desiring hearts' love and trust, and as "seeking such to worship Him," because therein they will find supreme and abiding bliss. "My glory," that wonderful personal being, which in its lowest debasement retains glimmering reflections caught from God, is never so truly glory as when it "sings praise to Thee," and never so blessed as when, through a longer "for ever" than the psalmist saw stretching before him, it "gives thanks unto Thee."

PSALM XXXI.

1 In Thee, Jehovah, have I taken refuge: let me never be ashamed;
In Thy righteousness deliver me.
2 Bend down Thine ear to me: speedily extricate me;
Be to me for a refuge-rock, for a fortress-house, to save me.
3 For my rock and my fortress art Thou,
And for Thy name's sake wilt guide me and lead me.
4 Thou wilt bring me from the net which they have hidden for me,
For Thou art my defence.

5 Into Thy hand I commend my spirit;
Thou hast redeemed me, Jehovah, God of faithfulness.
6 I hate the worshippers of empty nothingnesses;
And I—to Jehovah do I cling.
7 I will exult and be joyful in Thy loving-kindness,
Who hast beheld my affliction,
[And] hast taken note of the distresses of my soul,
8 And hast not enclosed me in the hand of the enemy;
Thou hast set my feet at large.

9 Be merciful to me, Jehovah, for I am in straits;
Wasted away in grief is my eye,—my soul and my body.
10 For my life is consumed with sorrow,
And my years with sighing;
My strength reels because of mine iniquity,
And my bones are wasted.
11 Because of all my adversaries I am become a reproach
And to my neighbours exceedingly, and a fear to my acquaintances;
They who see me without flee from me.
12 I am forgotten, out of mind, like a dead man;
I am like a broken vessel.
13 For I hear the whispering of many,
Terror on every side;
In their consulting together against me,
To take away my life do they scheme.

14 And I—on Thee I trust, Jehovah;
I say, My God art Thou.
15 In Thy hand are my times;
Rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from my pursuers.
16 Make Thy face to shine upon Thy servant;
Save me in Thy loving-kindness.
17 Jehovah, I shall not be shamed, for I cry to Thee;
The wicked shall be shamed, shall be silent in Sheol.
18 Dumb shall the lying lips be made,
That speak arrogance against the righteous,
In pride and contempt.

19 How great is Thy goodness which Thou dost keep in secret for them who fear Thee,
Dost work before the sons of men for them who take refuge in Thee.
20 Thou dost shelter them in the shelter of Thy face from the plots of men;
Thou keepest them in secret in an arbour from the strife of tongues.
21 Blessed be Jehovah,
For He has done marvels of loving-kindness for me in a strong city!
22 And I—I said in my agitation, I am cut off from before Thine eyes,
But truly Thou didst hear the voice of my supplication in my crying aloud to Thee.
23 Love Jehovah, all His beloved;
Jehovah keeps faithfulness,
And repays overflowingly him that practises pride.
24 Be strong, and let your heart take courage,
All ye that wait on Jehovah.

THE swift transitions of feeling in this psalm may seem strange to colder natures whose lives run smoothly, but reveal a brother-soul to those who have known what it is to ride on the top of the wave and then to go down into its trough. What is peculiar to the psalm is not only the inclusion of the whole gamut of feeling, but the force with which each key is struck and the persistence through all of the one ground tone of cleaving to Jehovah. The poetic temperament passes

quickly from hope to fear. The devout man in sorrow can sometimes look away from a darkened earth to a bright sky, but the stern realities of pain and loss again force themselves in upon him. The psalm is like an April day, in which sunshine and rain chase each other across the plain.

> "The beautiful uncertain weather,
> Where gloom and glory meet together,"

makes the landscape live, and is the precursor of fruitfulness.

The stream of the psalmist's thoughts now runs in shadow of grim cliffs and vexed by opposing rocks, and now opens out in sunny stretches of smoothness; but its source is "In Thee, Jehovah, do I take refuge" (ver. 1): and its end is "Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all ye that wait for Jehovah" (ver. 24).

The first turn of the stream is in vv. 1–4, which consist of petitions and their grounds. The prayers reveal the suppliant's state. They are the familiar cries of an afflicted soul common to many psalms, and presenting no special features. The needs of the human heart are uniform, and the cry of distress is much alike on all lips. This sufferer asks, as his fellows have done and will do, for deliverance, a swift answer, shelter and defence, guidance and leading, escape from the net spread for him. These are the commonplaces of prayer, which God is not wearied of hearing, and which fit us all. The last place to look for originality is in the "sighing of such as be sorrowful." The pleas on which the petitions rest are also familiar. The man who trusts in Jehovah has a right to expect that his trust will not be put to shame, since God is faithful. Therefore the first plea is the psalmist's faith, expressed

in ver. 1 by the word which literally means to flee to a refuge. The fact that he has done so makes his deliverance a work of God's "righteousness." The metaphor latent in "flee for refuge" comes into full sight in that beautiful plea in ver. 3, which unsympathetic critics would call illogical, "*Be* for me a refuge-rock, for . . . Thou *art* my rock." Be what Thou art; manifest Thyself in act to be what Thou art in nature: be what I, Thy poor servant, have taken Thee to be. My heart has clasped Thy revelation of Thyself and fled to this strong tower. Let me not be deceived and find it incapable of sheltering me from my foes. "Therefore for Thy name's sake," or because of that revelation and for its glory as true in men's sight, deliver me. God's nature as revealed is the strongest plea with Him, and surely that cannot but be potent and acceptable prayer which says, Be what Thou art, and what Thou hast taught me to believe Thee.

Vv. 5–8 prolong the tone of the preceding, with some difference, inasmuch as God's past acts are more specifically dwelt on as the ground of confidence. In this turn of the stream, faith does not so much supplicate as meditate, plucking the flower of confidence from the nettle of past dangers and deliverances, and renewing its acts of surrender. The sacred words which Jesus made His own on the cross, and which have been the last utterance of so many saints, were meant by the psalmist to apply to life, not to death. He laid his spirit as a precious deposit in God's hand, assured that He was able to keep that which was committed to Him. Often had he done this before, and now he does it once more. Petitions pass into surrender. Resignation as well as confidence speaks. To lay one's life in God's hand is to leave the disposal of it to Him, and such

absolute submission must come as the calm close and incipient reward of every cry for deliverance. Trust should not be hard to those who can remember. So Jehovah's past redemptions—*i.e.*, deliverances from temporal dangers—are its ground here; and these avail as pledges for the future, since He is "the God of truth," who can never falsify His past. The more nestlingly a soul clings to God, the more vehemently will it recoil from other trust. Attraction and repulsion are equal and contrary. The more clearly it sees God's faithfulness and living power as a reality operating in its life, the more penetrating will be its detection of the falseness of other helpers. "Nothingnesses of emptiness" are they all to one who has felt the clasp of that great, tender hand; and unless the soul feels them to be such, it will never strongly clutch or firmly hold its true stay. Such trust has its crown in joyful experience of God's mercy even before the actual deliverance comes to pass, as wind-borne fragrance meets the traveller before he sees the spice gardens from which it comes. The cohortative verbs in ver. 7 may be petition ("Let me exult"), or they may be anticipation of future gladness, but in either case some waft of joy has already reached the singer, as how could it fail to do, when his faith was thus renewing itself, and his eyes gazing on God's deeds of old? The past tenses in vv. 7, 8, refer to former experiences. God's sight of the psalmist's affliction was not idle contemplation, but implied active intervention. To "take note of the distresses of my soul" (or possibly, "of my soul in distresses") is the same as to care for it. It is enough to know that God sees the secret sorrows, the obscure trials which can be told to none. He loves as well as knows, and looks on no griefs which He will not comfort nor on any

wounds which He is not ready to bind up. The psalmist was sure that God had seen, because he had experienced His delivering power, as he goes on joyfully to tell. The figure in ver. 8 *a* points back to the act of trust in ver. 5. How should God let the hand of the enemy close round and crush the spirit which had been entrusted to His own hand? One sees the greedy fingers of the foe drawing themselves together on their prey as on a fly, but they close on nothing. Instead of suffering constraint the delivered spirit walks at liberty. They who are enclosed in God's hand have ample room there; and unhindered activity, with the ennobling consciousness of freedom, is the reward of trust.

Is it inconceivable that such sunny confidence should be suddenly clouded and followed, as in the third turn of thought (vv. 9–13), by plaintive absorption in the sad realities of present distress? The very remembrance of a brighter past may have sharpened the sense of present trouble. But it is to be noted that these complaints are prayer, not aimless, self-pitying wailing. The enumeration of miseries which begins with "Have mercy upon me, for——," has a hidden hope tinging its darkness, like the faint flush of sunrise on clouds. There is no such violent change of tone as is sometimes conceived; but the pleas of the former parts are continued in this section, which adds the psalmist's sore need to God's past and the suppliant's faith, as another reason for Jehovah's help. He begins with the effects of his trouble on himself in body and soul; thence he passes to its consequences on those around him, and finally he spreads before God its cause: plots against his life. The resemblances to Psalm vi. and to several parts of Jeremiah are unmistakable.

In vv. 9, 10, the physical and mental effects of anxiety are graphically described. Sunken eyes, enfeebled soul, wasted body, are gaunt witnesses of his distress. Cares seem to him to have gnawed his very bones, so weak is he. All that he can do is to sigh. And worse than all, conscience tells him that his own sin underlies his trouble, and so he is without inward stay. The picture seems exaggerated to easy-going, prosperous people; but many a sufferer has since recognised himself in it as in a mirror, and been thankful for words which gave voice to his pained heart and cheered him with the sense of companionship in the gloom.

Vv. 11, 12, are mainly the description of the often-repeated experience of friends forsaking the troubled. "Because of all my adversaries" somewhat anticipates ver. 13 in assigning the reason for the cowardly desertion. The three phrases "neighbours," "acquaintance," and "those who see me without" indicate concentric circles of increasing diameter. The psalmist is in the middle; and round him are, first, neighbours, who pour reproach on him, because of his enemies, then the wider range of "acquaintances," afraid to have anything to do with one who has such strong and numerous foes, and remotest of all, the chance people met on the way who fly from Him, as infected and dangerous. "They all forsook Him and fled." That bitter ingredient mingles in every cup of sorrow. The meanness of human nature and the selfishness of much apparent friendship are commonplaces, but the experience of them is always as painful and astonishing, as if nobody besides had ever suffered therefrom. The roughness of structure in ver. 11 *b*, "and unto my neighbours exceedingly," seems to fit the psalmist's emotion, and does not need the emendation of "ex-

ceedingly" into "burden" (Delitzsch) or "shaking of the head" (Cheyne).

In ver. 12 the desertion is bitterly summed up, as like the oblivion that waits for the dead. The unsympathising world goes on its way, and friends find new interests and forget the broken man, who used to be so much to them, as completely as if he were in his grave, or as they do the damaged cup, flung on the rubbish heap. Ver. 13 discloses the nature of the calamity which has had these effects. Whispering slanders buzz round him; he is ringed about with causes for fear, since enemies are plotting his death. The use of the first part of the verse by Jeremiah does not require the hypothesis of his authorship of the psalm, nor of the prophet's priority to the psalmist. It is always a difficult problem to settle which of two cases of the employment of the same phrase is original and which quotation. The criteria are elastic, and the conclusion is very often arrived at in deference to preconceived ideas. But Jeremiah uses the phrase as if it were a proverb or familiar expression, and the psalmist as if it were the freshly struck coinage of his own experience.

Again the key changes, and the minor is modulated into confident petition. It is the test of true trust that it is deepened by the fullest recognition of dangers and enemies. The same facts may feed despair and be the fuel of faith. This man's eyes took in all surrounding evils, and these drove him to avert his gaze from them and fix it on Jehovah. That is the best thing that troubles can do for us. If they, on the contrary, monopolise our sight, they turn our hearts to stone; but if we can wrench our stare from them, they clear our vision to see our Helper. In vv. 14–18 we have the recoil of the devout soul to God, occasioned by its

recognition of need and helplessness. This turn of the psalm begins with a strong emphatic adversative : "But I—I trust in Jehovah." We see the man flinging himself into the arms of God. The word for "trust" is the same as in ver. 6, and means to *hang* or *lean upon*, or, as we say, to *depend on*. He utters his trust in his prayer, which occupies the rest of this part of the psalm. A prayer, which is the voice of trust, does not begin with petition, but with renewed adherence to God and happy consciousness of the soul's relation to Him, and thence melts into supplication for the blessings which are consequences of that relation. To feel, on occasion of the very dreariness of circumstances, that God is mine, makes miraculous sunrise at midnight. Built on that act of trust claiming its portion in God, is the recognition of God's all-regulating hand, as shaping the psalmist's "times," the changing periods, each of which has its definite character, responsibilities, and opportunities. Every man's life is a series of crises, in each of which there is some special work to be done or lesson to be learned, some particular virtue to be cultivated or sacrifice made. The opportunity does not return. "It might have been once; and we missed it, lost it for ever."

But the psalmist is thinking rather of the varying complexion of his days as bright or dark; and looking beyond circumstances, he sees God. The "hand of mine enemies" seems shrivelled into impotence when contrasted with that great hand, to which he has committed his spirit, and in which are his "times"; and the psalmist's recognition that it holds his destiny is the ground of his prayer for deliverance from the foes' paralysed grasp. They who feel the tender clasp of an almighty hand need not doubt their security from

hostile assaults. The petitions proper are three in number: for deliverance, for the light of God's face, and for "salvation." The central petition recalls the priestly blessing (Num. vi. 25). It asks for consciousness of God's friendship and for the manifestation thereof in safety from present dangers. That face, turned in love to a man, can "make a sunshine in a shady place," and brings healing on its beams. It seems best to take the verbs in vv. 17, 18, as futures and not optatives. The prayer passes into assurance of its answer, and what was petition in ver. 1 is now trustful prediction: "I shall not be ashamed, for I cry to Thee." With like elevation of faith, the psalmist foresees the end of the whispering defamers round him: shame for their vain plots and their silent descent to the silent land. The loudest outcry against God's lovers will be hushed some day, and the hands that threatened them will be laid motionless and stiff across motionless breasts. He who stands by God and looks forward, can, by the light of that face, see the end of much transient bluster, "with pride and contempt," against the righteous. Lying lips fall dumb; praying lips, like the psalmist's, are opened to show forth God's praise. His prayer is audible still across the centuries; the mutterings of his enemies only live in his mention of them.

That assurance prepares the way for the noble burst of thanksgiving, as for accomplished deliverance, which ends the psalm, springing up in a joyous outpouring of melody, like a lark from a bare furrow. But there is no such change of tone as to warrant the supposition that these last verses (19–24) are either the psalmist's later addition or the work of another, nor do they oblige us to suppose that the whole psalm was written

after the peril which it commemorates had passed. Rather the same voice which triumphantly rings out in these last verses has been sounding in the preceding, even in their saddest strains. The ear catches a twitter hushed again and renewed more than once before the full song breaks out. The psalmist has been absorbed with his own troubles till now, but thankfulness expands his vision, and suddenly there is with him a multitude of fellow-dependants on God's goodness. He hungers alone, but he feasts in company. The abundance of God's "goodness" is conceived of as a treasure stored, and in part openly displayed, before the sons of men. The antithesis suggests manifold applications of the contrast, such as the inexhaustibleness of the mercy which, after all revelation, remains unrevealed, and, after all expenditure, has not perceptibly diminished in its shining mass, as of bullion in some vault; or the varying dealings of God, who sometimes, while sorrow is allowed to have its scope, seems to keep His riches of help under lock and key, and then again flashes them forth in deeds of deliverance; or the difference between the partial unfolding of these on earth and the full endowment of His servants with "riches in glory" hereafter. All these carry the one lesson that there is more in God than any creature or all creatures have ever drawn from Him or can ever draw. The repetition of the idea of hiding in ver. 20 is a true touch of devout poetry. The same word is used for laying up the treasure and for sheltering in a pavilion from the jangle of tongues. The wealth and the poor men who need it are stored together, as it were; and the place where they both lie safe is God Himself. How can they be poor who are dwelling close beside infinite riches? The psalmist has just prayed that God would

make His face to shine upon him ; and now he rejoices in the assurance of the answer, and knows himself and all like-minded men to be hidden in that "glorious privacy of light," where evil things cannot live. As if caught up to and "clothed with the sun," he and they are beyond the reach of hostile conspiracies, and have "outsoared the shadow of" earth's antagonisms. The great thought of security in God has never been more nobly expressed than by that magnificent metaphor of the light inaccessible streaming from God's face to be the bulwark of a poor man.

The personal tone recurs for a moment in vv. 21, 22, in which it is doubtful whether we hear thankfulness for deliverance anticipated as certain and so spoken of as past, since it is as good as done, or for some recently experienced marvel of loving-kindness, which heartens the psalmist in present trouble. If this psalm is David's, the reference may be to his finding a city of refuge, at the time when his fortunes were very low, in Ziklag, a strange place for a Jewish fugitive to be sheltered. One can scarcely help feeling that the allusion is so specific as to suggest historical fact as its basis. At the same time it must be admitted that the expression may be the carrying on of the metaphor of the hiding in a pavilion. The "strong city" is worthily interpreted as being God Himself, though the historical explanation is tempting. God's mercy makes a true man ashamed of his doubts, and therefore the thanksgiving of ver. 21 leads to the confession of ver. 22. Agitated into despair, the psalmist had thought that he was "cut off from God's eyes"—*i.e.*, hidden so as not to be helped—but the event has showed that God both heard and saw him. If alarm does not so make us think that God is blind to our need and deaf to our cry

as to make us dumb, we shall be taught the folly of our fears by His answers to our prayers. These will have a voice of gentle rebuke, and ask us, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" He delivers first, and lets the deliverance stand in place of chiding.

The whole closes with a summons to all whom Jehovah loves to love Him for His mercy's sake. The joyful singer longs for a chorus to join his single voice, as all devout hearts do. He generalises his own experience, as all who have for themselves experienced deliverance are entitled and bound to do, and discerns that in his single case the broad law is attested that the faithful are guarded whatever dangers assail, and "the proud doer" abundantly repaid for all his contempt and hatred of the just. Therefore the last result of contemplating God's ways with His servants is an incentive to courage, strength, and patient waiting for the Lord.

PSALM XXXII.

1 Blessed he whose transgression is taken away, whose sin is covered,
2 Blessed the man to whom Jehovah reckons not iniquity,
In whose spirit is no guile.

3 When I kept silence, my bones rotted away,
Through my roaring all the day.
4 For day and night Thy hand weighed heavily upon me;
My sap was turned [as] in droughts of summer. Selah.

5 My sin I acknowledged to Thee, and my iniquity I covered not;
I said, I will confess because of my transgressions to Jehovah,
And Thou—Thou didst take away the iniquity of my sin. Selah

6 Because of this let every one beloved [of Thee] pray to Thee in a time of finding;
Surely when great waters are in flood, to him they shall not reach.
7 Thou art a shelter for me; from trouble wilt Thou preserve me,
[With] shouts of deliverance wilt encircle me. Selah.

8 I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shouldest go;
I will counsel thee, [with] mine eye upon thee.
9 Be not ye like horse, like mule, without understanding,
Whose harness to hold them in is bit and bridle,
Else no coming near to thee.
10 The wicked has many sorrows,
And he who trusts in Jehovah—with loving-kindness will He encircle him.

11 Rejoice in Jehovah, and exult, ye righteous;
And shout joyfully, all ye upright of heart.

ONE must have a dull ear not to hear the voice of personal experience in this psalm. It throbs with emotion, and is a burst of rapture from a heart tasting the sweetness of the new joy of forgiveness.

It is hard to believe that the speaker is but a personification of the nation, and the difficulty is recognised by Cheyne's concession that we have here "principally, though not exclusively, a national psalm." The old opinion that it records David's experience in the dark time when, for a whole year, he lived impenitent after his great sin of sense, and was then broken down by Nathan's message and restored to peace through pardon following swiftly on penitence, is still defensible, and gives a fit setting for this gem. Whoever was the singer, his song goes deep down to permanent realities in conscience and in men's relations to God, and therefore is not for an age, but for all time. Across the dim waste of years, we hear this man speaking our sins, our penitence, our joy; and the antique words are as fresh, and fit as close to our experiences, as if they had been welled up from a living heart to-day. The theme is the way of forgiveness and its blessedness; and this is set forth in two parts: the first (vv. 1–5) a leaf from the psalmist's autobiography, the second (ver. 6 to end) the generalisation of individual experience and its application to others. In each part the prevailing division of verses is into strophes of two, each containing two members, but with some irregularity.

The page from the psalmist's confessions (vv. 1–5) begins with a burst of rapturous thankfulness for the joy of forgiveness (vv. 1, 2), passes to paint in dark colours the misery of sullen impenitence (vv. 3, 4), and then, in one longer verse, tells with glad wonder how sudden and complete was the transition to the joy of forgiveness by the way of penitence. It is a chart of one man's path from the depths to the heights, and avails to guide all

The psalmist begins abruptly with an exclamation (Oh, the blessedness, etc.). His new joy wells up irrepressibly. To think that he who had gone so far down in the mire, and had locked his lips in silence for so long, should find himself so blessed! Joy so exuberant cannot content itself with one statement of its grounds. It runs over in synonyms for sin and its forgiveness, which are not feeble tautology. The heart is too full to be emptied at one outpouring, and though all the clauses describe the same things, they do so with differences. This is true with regard to the words both for sin and for pardon. The three designations of the former present three aspects of its hideousness. The first, rendered ("transgression,") conceives of it as rebellion against rightful authority, not merely breach of an impersonal law, but breaking away from a rightful king. The second ("sin") describes it as missing a mark. What is in regard to God rebellion is in regard to myself missing the aim, whether that aim be considered as that which a man is, by his very make and relations, intended to be and do, or as that which he proposes to himself by his act. All sin tragically fails to hit the mark in both these senses. It is a failure as to reaching the ideal of conduct, "the chief end of man," and not less so as to winning the satisfaction sought by the deed. It keeps the word of promise to the ear, and breaks it to the hope, ever luring by lying offers; and if it gives the poor delights which it holds out, it ever adds something that embitters them, like spirits of wine methylated and made undrinkable. It is always a blunder to do wrong. The last synonym ("iniquity") means crookedness or distortion, and seems to embody the same idea as our words "right" and "wrong," namely the contrast

between the straight line of duty and the contorted lines drawn by sinful hands. What runs parallel with law is right; what diverges is wrong. The three expressions for pardon are also eloquent in their variety. The first word means taken away or lifted off, as a burden from aching shoulders. It implies more than holding back penal consequences; it is the removal of sin itself, and that not merely in the multitudinousness of its manifestations in act, but in the depth of its inward source. This is the metaphor which Bunyan has made so familiar by his picture of the pilgrim losing his load at the cross. The second ("covered") paints pardon as God's shrouding the foul thing from His pure eyes, so that His action is no longer determined by its existence. The third describes forgiveness as God's not reckoning a man's sin to him, in which expression hovers some allusion to cancelling a debt. The clause "in whose spirit is no guile" is best taken as a conditional one, pointing to sincerity which confesses guilt as a condition of pardon. But the alternative construction as a continuation of the description of the forgiven man is quite possible; and if thus understood, the crowning blessing of pardon is set forth as being the liberation of the forgiven spirit from all "guile" or evil. God's kiss of forgiveness sucks the poison from the wound.

Retrospect of the dismal depth from which it has climbed is natural to a soul sunning itself on high. Therefore on the overflowing description of present blessedness follows a shuddering glance downwards to past unrest. Sullen silence caused the one; frank acknowledgment brought the other. He who will not speak his sin to God has to groan. A dumb conscience often makes a loud-voiced pain. This man's sin had

indeed missed its aim; for it had brought about three things: rotting bones (which may be but a strong metaphor or may be a physical fact), the consciousness of God's displeasure dimly felt as if a great hand were pressing him down, and the drying up of the sap of his life, as if the fierce heat of summer had burned the marrow in his bones. These were the fruits of pleasant sin, and by reason of them many a moan broke from his locked lips. Stolid indifference may delay remorse, but its serpent fang strikes soon or later, and then strength and joy die. The Selah indicates a swell or prolongation of the accompaniment, to emphasise this terrible picture of a soul gnawing itself.

The abrupt turn to description of the opposite disposition in ver. 5 suggests a sudden gush of penitence. As at a bound, the soul passes from dreary remorse. The break with the former self is complete, and effected in one wrench. Some things are best done by degrees; and some, of which forsaking sin is one, are best done quickly. And as swift as the resolve to crave pardon, so swift is the answer giving it. We are reminded of that gospel compressed into a verse, "David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin." Again the three designations of sin are employed, though in different order; and the act of confession is thrice mentioned, as that of forgiveness was. The fulness and immediateness of pardon are emphatically given by the double epithet "the iniquity of thy sin" and by the representation that it follows the resolve to confess, and does not wait for the act. The Divine love is so eager to forgive that it tarries not for actual confession, but anticipates it, as the father interrupts the prodigal's acknowledgment with gifts and welcome.

The Selah at the end of ver. 5 is as triumphant as that at the close of ver. 4 had been sad. It parts the autobiographical section from the more general one which follows.

In the second part the solitary soul translates its experience into exhortations for all, and woos men to follow on the same path, by setting forth in rich variety the joys of pardon. The exhortation first dwells on the positive blessings associated with penitence (vv. 6, 7), and next on the degradation and sorrow involved in obstinate hard-heartedness (vv. 8–10). The natural impulse of him who has known both is to beseech others to share his happy experience, and the psalmist's course of thought obeys that impulse, for the future "shall pray" (R.V.) is better regarded as hortatory "let . . . pray." "Because of this" does not express the contents of the petitions, but their reason. The manifestation of God as infinitely ready to forgive should hearten to prayer; and, since God's beloved need forgiveness day by day, even though they may not have fallen into such gross sin as this psalmist, there is no incongruity in the exhortation being addressed to them. "He that is washed" still needs that feet fouled in muddy ways should be cleansed. Every time of seeking by such prayer is a "time of finding"; but the phrase implies that there is a time of not finding, and, in its very graciousness, is heavy with warning against delay. With forgiveness comes security. The penitent, praying, pardoned man is set as on a rock islet in the midst of floods, whether these be conceived of as temptation to sin or as calamities. The hortatory tone is broken in ver. 7 by the recurrence of the personal element, since the singer's heart was too full for silence; but there is no real interruption, for the

joyous utterance of one's own faith is often the most winning persuasive, and a devout man can scarcely hold out to others the sweetness of finding God without at the same time tasting what he offers. Unless he does, his words will ring unreal. "Thou art a shelter for me" (same word as in xxvii. 5, xxxi. 20), is the utterance of trust; and the emphasis is on "my." To hide in God is to be "preserved from trouble," not in the sense of being exempt, but in that of not being overwhelmed, as the beautiful last clause of v. 7 shows, in which "shouts of deliverance" from trouble which had pressed are represented by a bold, but not harsh, metaphor as ringing the psalmist round. The air is filled with jubilant voices, the echoes of his own. The word rendered "songs" or preferably "shouts" is unusual, and its consonants repeat the last three of the preceding word ("shalt preserve me"). These peculiarities have led to the suggestion that we have in it a "dittograph." If so, the remaining words of the last clause would read, "Thou wilt compass me about with deliverance," which would be a perfectly appropriate expression. But probably the similarity of letters is a play upon words, of which we have another example in the preceding clause where the consonants of the word for "trouble," reappear in their order in the verb "wilt preserve." The shout of joy is caught up by the Selah.

But now the tone changes into solemn warning against obstinate disregard of God's leading. It is usual to suppose that the psalmist still speaks, but surely "I will counsel thee, with mine eye upon thee," does not fit human lips. It is to be observed, too, that in ver. 8 a single person is addressed, who is most naturally taken to be the same as he who spoke his individual faith in ver. 7. In other words, the psalmist's

confidence evokes a Divine response, and that brief interchange of clinging trust and answering promise stands in the midst of the appeal to men, which it scarcely interrupts. Ver. 9 may either be regarded as the continuance of the Divine voice, or perhaps better, as the resumption by the psalmist of his hortatory address. God's direction as to duty and protection in peril are both included in the promise of ver. 8. With His eye upon His servant, He will show him the way, and will keep him ever in sight as he travels on it. The beautiful meaning of the A.V., that God guides with a glance those who dwell near enough to Him to see His look, is scarcely contained in the words, though it is true that the sense of pardon binds men to Him in such sweet bonds that they are eager to catch the faintest indications of His will, and "His looks command, His lightest words are spells."

Vv. 9, 10, are a warning against brutish obstinacy. The former verse has difficulties in detail, but its drift is plain. It contrasts the gracious guidance which avails for those made docile by forgiveness and trust with the harsh constraint which must curb and coerce mulish natures. The only things which such understand are bits and bridles. They will not come near to God without such rough outward constraint, any more than an unbroken horse will approach a man unless dragged by a halter. That untamableness except by force is the reason why "many sorrows" must strike "the wicked." If these are here compared to "bit" and "bridle," they are meant to drive to God, and are therefore regarded as being such mercies as the obstinate are capable of receiving. Obedience extorted by force is no obedience, but approach to God compelled by sorrows that restrain unbridled licence of tempers and of sense

is accepted as a real approach and then is purged into access with confidence. They who are at first driven are afterwards drawn, and taught to know no delight so great as that of coming and keeping near God.

The antithesis of "wicked" and "he that trusteth in Jehovah" is significant as teaching that faith is the true opposite of sinfulness. Not less full of meaning is the sequence of trust, righteousness, and uprightness of heart in vv. 10, 11. Faith leads to righteousness, and they are upright, not who have never fallen, but who have been raised from their fall by pardon. The psalmist had thought of himself as compassed with shouts of deliverance. Another circle is cast round him and all who, with him, trust Jehovah. A ring of mercies, like a fiery wall, surrounds the pardoned, faithful soul, without a break through which a real evil can creep. Therefore the encompassing songs of deliverance are continuous as the mercies which they hymn, and in the centre of that double circle the soul sits secure and thankful.

The psalm ends with a joyful summons to general joy. All share in the solitary soul's exultation. The depth of penitence measures the height of gladness. The breath that was spent in "roaring all the day long" is used for shouts of deliverance. Every tear sparkles like a diamond in the sunshine of pardon, and he who begins with the lowly cry for forgiveness will end with lofty songs of joy and be made, by God's guidance and Spirit, righteous and upright in heart.

PSALM XXXIII.

1 Rejoice aloud, ye righteous, in Jehovah,
For the upright praise is seemly.
2 Give thanks to Jehovah with harp;
With ten-stringed psaltery play unto Him.
3 Sing to Him a new song,
Strike well [the strings] with joyful shouts.

4 For upright is the word of Jehovah,
And all His work is in faithfulness.
5 He loves righteousness and judgment,
Of Jehovah's loving-kindness the earth is full.
6 By the word of Jehovah the heavens were made,
And all their host by the breath of His mouth.
7 Who gathereth as an heap the waters of the sea,
Who layeth up the deeps in storehouses.
8 Let all the earth fear Jehovah,
Before Him let all inhabitants of the world stand in awe.
9 For He, He spoke and it was;
He, He commanded and it stood.
10 Jehovah has brought to nothing the counsel of the nations,
He has frustrated the designs of the peoples.
11 The counsel of Jehovah shall stand for ever,
The designs of His heart to generation after generation.

12 Blessed is the nation whose God is Jehovah,
The people He has chosen for an inheritance for Himself.
13 From heaven Jehovah looks down,
He beholds all the sons of men.
14 From the place where He sits, He gazes
On all the inhabitants of earth:—
15 Even He who forms the hearts of them all,
Who marks all their works.
16 A king is not saved by the greatness of [his] army,
A hero is not delivered by the greatness of [his] strength.

17 A horse is a vain thing for safety;
And by the greatness of its strength it does not give escape.
18 Behold the eye of Jehovah is on them who fear Him,
On them who hope for His loving-kindness,
19 To deliver their soul from death,
And to keep them alive in famine.
20 Our soul waits for Jehovah,
Our help and our shield is He.
21 For in Him shall our heart rejoice,
For in His holy name have we trusted.
22 Let Thy loving-kindness, Jehovah, be upon us,
According as we have hoped for Thee.

THIS is the last of the four psalms in Book I. which have no title, the others being Psalms i., ii., which are introductory, and x. which is closely connected with ix. Some have endeavoured to establish a similar connection between xxxii. and xxxiii.; but, while the closing summons to the righteous in the former is substantially repeated in the opening words of the latter, there is little other trace of connection, except the references in both to "the eye" of Jehovah" (xxxii. 8, xxxiii. 18); and no two psalms could be more different in subject and tone than these. The one is full of profound, personal emotion, and deals with the depths of experience; the other is devoid of personal reference, and is a devout, calm contemplation of the creative power and providential government of God. It is kindred with the later type of psalms, and has many verbal allusions connecting it with them. It has probably been placed here simply because of the similarity just noticed between its beginning and the end of the preceding. The reasons for the arrangement of the psalter were, so far as they can be traced, usually such merely verbal coincidences. To one who has been travelling through the heights and depths, the storms and sunny gleams of the previous psalms, this

impersonal didactic meditation, with its historical allusions and entire ignoring of sins and sorrows, is indeed "a new song." It is apparently meant for liturgical use, and falls into three unequal parts; the first three verses and the last three being prelude and conclusion, the former summoning the "righteous" to praise Jehovah, the latter putting words of trust and triumph and prayer into their mouths. The central mass (vv. 4–19) celebrates the creative and providential work of God, in two parts, of which the first extends these Divine acts over the world (vv. 4–11) and the second concentrates them on Israel (vv. 12–19).

The opening summons to praise takes us far away from the solitary wrestlings and communings in former psalms. Now

> "The singers lift up their voice,
> And the trumpets make endeavour,
> Sounding, 'In God rejoice!
> In Him rejoice for ever!'"

But the clear recognition of purity as the condition of access to God speaks in this invocation as distinctly as in any of the preceding. "The righteous" whose lives conform to the Divine will, and only they can shout aloud their joy in Jehovah. Praise fits and adorns the lips of the "upright" only, whose spirits are without twist of self-will and sin. The direction of character expressed in the word is horizontal rather than vertical, and is better represented by "straight" than "upright." Praise gilds the gold of purity and adds grace even to the beauty of holiness. Experts tell us that the *kinnor* (harp, A.V. and R.V.) and *nebel* (psaltery) were both stringed instruments, differing in the position of the sounding board, which was below in the former and above in the latter, and also in the covering of the

strings (*v.* Delitzsch, Eng. transl. of latest ed., I. 7, n.). The "new song" is not necessarily the psalm itself, but may mean other thanksgivings evoked by God's meditated-on goodness. But, in any case, it is noteworthy that the occasions of the new song are very old acts, stretching back to the first creation and continued down through the ages. The psalm has no trace of special recent mercies, but to the devout soul the old deeds are never antiquated, and each new meditation on them breaks into new praise. So inexhaustible is the theme that all generations take it up in turn, and find "songs unheard" and "sweeter" with which to celebrate it. Each new rising of the old sun brings music from the lips of Memnon, as he sits fronting the east. The facts of revelation must be sung by each age and soul for itself, and the glowing strains grow cold and archaic, while the ancient mercies which they magnify live on bright and young. There is always room for a fresh voice to praise the old gospel, the old creation, the old providence.

This new song is saturated with reminiscences of old ones, and deals with familiar thoughts which have come to the psalmist with fresh power. He magnifies the moral attributes manifested in God's self-revelation, His creative Word, and His providential government. "The word of Jehovah," in ver. 4, is to be taken in the wide sense of every utterance of His thought or will ("non accipi pro doctrina, sed pro mundi gubernandi ratione," Calvin). It underlies His "works," as is more largely declared in the following verses. It is "upright," the same word as in ver. 1, and here equivalent to the general idea of morally perfect. The acts which flow from it are "in faithfulness," correspond to and keep His word. The perfect word and works have for

source the deep heart of Jehovah, which loves "righteousness and judgment," and therefore speaks and acts in accordance with these. Therefore the outcome of all is a world full of God's loving-kindness. The psalmist has won that "serene and blessed mood" in which the problem of life seems easy, and all harsh and gloomy thoughts have melted out of the sky. There is but one omnipotent Will at work everywhere, and that is a Will whose law for itself is the love of righteousness and truth. The majestic simplicity and universality of the cause are answered by the simplicity and universality of the result, the flooding of the whole world with blessing. Many another psalm shows how hard it is to maintain such a faith in the face of the terrible miseries of men, and the more complex "civilisation" becomes, the harder it grows; but it is well to hear sometimes the one clear note of gladness without its chord of melancholy.

The work of creation is set forth in vv. 6–9, as the effect of the Divine word alone. The psalmist is fascinated not by the glories created, but by the wonder of the process of creation. The Divine will uttered itself, and the universe was. Of course the thought is parallel with that of Genesis, "God said, Let there be . . . and there was . . ." Nor are we to antedate the Christian teaching of a personal Word of God, the agent of creation. The old versions and interpreters, followed by Cheyne, read "as in a bottle" for "as an heap," vocalising the text differently from the present pointing; but there seems to be an allusion to the wall of waters at the passage of the Red Sea, the same word being used in Miriam's song; with "depths" in the next clause, there as here (Exod. xv. 8). What is meant, however, here, is the separation of land and water at first,

and possibly the continuance of the same power keeping them still apart, since the verbs in ver. 7 are participles, which imply continued action. The image of "an heap" is probably due to the same optical delusion which has coined the expression "the high seas," since, to an eye looking seawards from the beach, the level waters seem to rise as they recede; or it may merely express the gathering together in a mass. Away out there, in that ocean of which the Hebrews knew so little, were unplumbed depths in which, as in vast storehouses, the abundance of the sea was shut up, and the ever-present Word which made them at first was to them instead of bolts and bars. Possibly the thought of the storehouses suggested that of the Flood when these were opened, and that thought, crossing the psalmist's mind, led to the exhortation in ver. 8 to fear Jehovah, which would more naturally have followed ver. 9. The power displayed in creation is, however, a sufficient ground for the summons to reverent obedience, and ver. 9 may be but an emphatic repetition of the substance of the foregoing description. It is eloquent in its brevity and juxtaposition of the creative word and the created world. "It stood,"—"the word includes much: first, the coming into being (*Entstehen*), then, the continued subsistence (*Bestehen*), lastly attendance (*Dastehen*) in readiness for service" (Stier).

From the original creation the psalmist's mind runs over the ages between it and him, and sees the same mystical might of the Divine Will working in what we call providential government. God's bare word has power without material means. Nay, His very thoughts unspoken are endowed with immortal vigour, and are at bottom the only real powers in history. God's "thoughts stand," as creation does, lasting on through

all men's fleeting years. With reverent boldness the psalm parallels the processes (if we may so speak) of the Divine mind with those of the human; "counsel" and "thoughts" being attributed to both. But how different the issue of the solemn thoughts of God and those of men, in so far as they are not in accordance with His! It unduly narrows the sweep of the psalmist's vision to suppose that he is speaking of a recent experience when some assault on Israel was repelled. He is much rather linking the hour of creation with to-day by one swift summary of the net result of all history. The only stable, permanent reality is the will of God, and it imparts derived stability to those who ally themselves with it, yielding to its counsels and moulding their thoughts by its. "He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever," but the shore of time is littered with wreckage, the sad fragments of proud fleets which would sail in the teeth of the wind and went to pieces on the rocks.

From such thoughts the transition to the second part of the main body of the psalm is natural. Vv. 12–19 are a joyous celebration of the blessedness of Israel as the people of so great a God. The most striking feature of these verses is the pervading reference to the passage of the Red Sea which, as we have already seen, has coloured ver. 7. From Miriam's song come the designation of the people as God's "inheritance," and the phrase "the place of His habitation" (Exod. xv. 17). The "looking upon the inhabitants of the earth," and the thought that the "eye of Jehovah is upon them that fear Him, to deliver their soul in death" (vv. 14, 18), remind us of the Lord's looking from the pillar on the host of Egyptians and the terrified crowd of fugitives, and of the same glance being darkness to the

one and light to the other. The abrupt introduction of the king not saved by his host, and of the vanity of the horse for safety, are explained if we catch an echo of Miriam's ringing notes, "Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath He cast into the sea. . . . The horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea" (Exod. xv. 4, 21).

If this historical allusion be not recognised, the connection of these verses is somewhat obscure, but still discernible. The people who stand in special relation to God are blessed, because that eye, which sees all men, rests on them in loving-kindness and with gracious purpose of special protection. This contrast of God's universal knowledge and of that knowledge which is accompanied with loving care is the very nerve of these verses, as is shown by the otherwise aimless repetition of the thought of God's looking down on men. There is a wide all-seeingness, characterised by three words in an ascending scale of closeness of observance, in vv. 13, 14. It is possible to God as being Creator: "He fashions their hearts individually," or "one by one," seems the best interpretation of ver. 15 *a*, and thence is deduced His intimate knowledge of all His creatures' doings. The sudden turn to the impotence of earthly might, as illustrated by the king and the hero and the battle-horse, may be taken as intended to contrast the weakness of such strength both with the preceding picture of Divine omniscience and almightiness, and with the succeeding assurance of safety in Jehovah. The true reason for the blessedness of the chosen people is that God's eye is on them, not merely with cold omniscience nor with critical considering of their works, but with the direct purpose of sheltering them from surrounding evil. But the stress of the characterisation of these guarded and nourished

favourites of heaven is now laid not upon a Divine act of choice, but upon their meek looking to Him. His eye meets with love the upturned patient eye of humble expectance and loving fear.

What should be the issue of such thoughts, but the glad profession of trust, with which the psalm fittingly ends, corresponding to the invocation to praise which began it? Once in each of these three closing verses do the speakers profess their dependence on God. The attitude of waiting with fixed hope and patient submission is the characteristic of God's true servants in all ages. In it are blended consciousness of weakness and vulnerability, dread of assault, reliance on Divine Love, confidence of safety, patience, submission and strong aspiration.

These were the tribal marks of God's people, when this was "a new song"; they are so to-day, for, though the Name of the Lord be more fully known by Christ, the trust in it is the same. A threefold good is possessed, expected and asked as the issue of this waiting. God is "help and shield" to those who exercise it. Its sure fruit is joy in Him, since He will answer the expectance of His people, and will make His name more fully known and more sweet to those who have clung to it, in so far as they knew it. The measure of hope in God is the measure of experience of His loving-kindness, and the closing prayer does not allege hope as meriting the answer which it expects, but recognises that desire is a condition of possession of God's best gifts, and knows it to be most impossible of all impossibilities that hope fixed on God should be ashamed. Hands, lifted empty to heaven in longing trust, will never drop empty back and hang listless, without a blessing in their grasp.

PSALM XXXIV.

1 (א) I will bless Jehovah at all times,
Continually shall His praise be in my mouth.
2 (ב) In Jehovah my soul shall boast herself,
The humble shall hear and rejoice.
3 (ג) Magnify Jehovah with me,
And let us exalt His name together.

4 (ד) I sought Jehovah and He answered me,
And from all my terrors did He deliver me.
5 (ה) They looked to Him and were brightened,
(ו) And their faces did not blush.
6 (ז) This afflicted man cried and Jehovah heard,
And from all his distresses saved him.
7 (ח) The angel of Jehovah encamps round them that fear Him,
And delivers them.
8 (ט) Taste and see that Jehovah is good;
Happy the man that takes refuge in Him.
9 (י) Fear Jehovah, ye His holy ones;
For there is no want to them that fear Him.
10 (כ) Young lions famish and starve,
But they that seek Jehovah shall not want any good.

11 (ל) Come [my] sons, hearken to me;
I will teach you the fear of Jehovah.
12 (מ) Who is the man who desires life,
Who loves [many] days, in order to see good?
13 (נ) Keep thy tongue from evil,
And thy lips from speaking deceit.
14 (ס) Depart from evil and do good;
Seek peace and pursue it.
15 (ע) The eyes of Jehovah are toward the righteous,
And His ears are towards their loud cry.
16 (פ) The face of Jehovah is against the doers of evil,
To cut off their remembrance from the earth.

17 (צ) The righteous cry and Jehovah hears;
And from all their straits He rescues them.
18 (ק) Jehovah is near to the broken in heart,
And the crushed in spirit He saves.
19 (ר) Many are the afflictions of the righteous;
But from them all Jehovah delivers him.
20 (ש) He keeps all his bones,
Not one of them is broken.
21 (ת) Evil shall slay the wicked;
And the haters of the righteous shall be held guilty.
22 (פ) Jehovah redeems the soul of His servants;
And not held guilty shall any be who take refuge in Him.

THE occasion of this psalm, according to the superscription, was that humiliating and questionable episode, when David pretended insanity to save his life from the ruler of Goliath's city of Gath. The set of critical opinion sweeps away this tradition as unworthy of serious refutation. The psalm is acrostic, therefore of late date; there are no references to the supposed occasion; the careless scribe has blundered "blindly" (Hupfeld) in the king's name, mixing up the stories about Abraham and Isaac in Genesis with the legend about David at Gath; the didactic, gnomical cast of the psalm speaks of a late age. But the assumption that acrostic structure is necessarily a mark of late date is not by any means self-evident, and needs more proof than is forthcoming; the absence of plain allusions to the singer's circumstances cuts both ways, and suggests the question, how the attribution to the period stated arose, since there is nothing in the psalm to suggest it; the blunder of the king's name is perhaps not a blunder after all, but, as the Genesis passages seem to imply, "Abimelech (the father of the King) may be a title, like Pharaoh, common to Philistine "kings," and Achish may have been the name of the reigning Abimelech; the proverbial style and somewhat

slight connection and progress of thought are necessary results of acrostic fetters. If the psalm be David's, the contrast between the degrading expedient which saved him and the exalted sentiments here is remarkable, but not incredible. The seeming idiot scrabbling on the gate is now saint, poet, and preacher; and, looking back on the deliverance won by a trick, he thinks of it as an instance of Jehovah's answer to prayer! It is a strange psychological study; and yet, keeping in view the then existing standard of morality as to stratagems in warfare, and the wonderful power that even good men have of ignoring flaws in their faith and faults in their conduct, we may venture to suppose that the event which evoked this song of thanksgiving and is transfigured in ver. 4 is the escape by craft from Achish. To David his feigning madness did not seem inconsistent with trust and prayer.

Whatever be the occasion of the psalm, its course of thought is obvious. There is first a vow of praise in which others are summoned to unite (vv. 1–3); then follows a section in which personal experience and invocation to others are similarly blended (vv. 4–10); and finally a purely didactic section, analysing the practical manifestations of "the fear of the Lord" and enforcing it by the familiar contrast of the blessedness of the righteous and the miserable fate of the ungodly. Throughout we find familiar turns of thought and expression, such as are usual in acrostic psalms.

The glad vow of unbroken praise and undivided trust, which begins the psalm, sounds like the welling over of a heart for recent mercy. It seems easy and natural while the glow of fresh blessings is felt, to "rejoice in the Lord always, and again to say Rejoice." Thankfulness which looks forward to its own cessation,

and takes into account the distractions of circumstance and changes of mood which will surely come, is too foreseeing. Whether the vow be kept or no, it is well that it should be made; still better is it that it should be kept, as it may be, even amid distracting circumstances and changing moods. The incense on the altar did not flame throughout the day, but, being fanned into a glow at morning and evening sacrifice, it smouldered with a thread of fragrant smoke continually. It is not only the exigencies of the acrostic which determine the order in ver. 2: "In Jehovah shall my soul boast,"—*in Him*, and not in self or worldly ground, of trust and glorying. The ideal of the devout life, which in moments of exaltation seems capable of realisation, as in clear weather Alpine summits look near enough to be reached in an hour, is unbroken praise and undivided reliance on and joy in Jehovah. But alas—how far above us the peaks are! Still to see them ennobles, and to strive to reach them secures an upward course.

The solitary heart hungers for sympathy in its joy, as in its sorrow; but knows full well that such can only be given by those who have known like bitterness and have learned submission in the same way. We must be purged of self in order to be glad in another's deliverance, and must be pupils in the same school in order to be entitled to take his experience as our encouragement, and to make a chorus to his solo of thanksgiving. The invocation is so natural an expression of the instinctive desire for companionship in praise that one needs not to look for any particular group to whom it is addressed; but if the psalm be David's, the call is not inappropriate in the mouth of the leader of his band of devoted followers.

The second section of the psalm (vv. 4–10) is at first biographical, and then generalises personal experience into broad universal truth. But even in recounting what befel himself, the singer will not eat his morsel alone, but is glad to be able at every turn to feel that he has companions in his happy experience. Vv. 4, 5 are a pair, as are vv. 6, 7, and in each the same fact is narrated first in reference to the single soul, and then in regard to all the servants of Jehovah. "This poor man" is by most of the older expositors taken to be the psalmist, but by the majority of moderns supposed to be an individualising way of saying, "poor men." The former explanation seems to me the more natural, as preserving the parallelism between the two groups of verses. If so, the close correspondence of expression in vv. 4 and 6 is explained, since the same event is subject of both. In both is the psalmist's appeal to Jehovah presented; in the one as "seeking" with anxious eagerness, and in the other as "crying" with the loud call of one in urgent need of immediate rescue. In both, Divine acceptance follows close on the cry, and in both immediately ensues succour. "He delivered me from all my fears," and "saved him out of all his troubles," correspond entirely, though not verbally. In like manner vv. 5 and 7 are alike in extending the blessing of the unit so as to embrace the class. The absence of any expressed subject of the verb in ver. 5 makes the statement more comprehensive, like the French "*on*," or English "they." To "look unto Him" is the same thing as is expressed in the individualising verses by the two phrases, "sought," and "cried unto," only the metaphor is changed into that of silent, wistful directing of beseeching and sad eyes to God. And its issue is beautifully told, in pur-

suance of the metaphor. Whoever turns his face to Jehovah will receive reflected brightness on his face; as when a mirror is directed sunwards, the dark surface will flash into sudden glory. Weary eyes will gleam. Faces turned to the sun are sure to be radiant.

The hypothesis of the Davidic authorship gives special force to the great assurance of ver. 7. The fugitive, in his rude shelter in the cave of Adullam, thinks of Jacob, who, in his hour of defenceless need, was heartened by the vision of the angel encampment surrounding his own little band, and named the place "Mahanaim," the two camps. That fleeting vision was a temporary manifestation of abiding reality. Wherever there is a camp of them that fear God, there is another, of which the helmed and sworded angel that appeared to Joshua is Captain, and the name of every such place is Two Camps. That is the sight which brightens the eyes that look to God. That mysterious personality, "the Angel of the Lord," is only mentioned in the Psalter here and in Psalm xxxv. In other places, He appears as the agent of Divine communications, and especially as the guide and champion of Israel. He is "the angel of God's face," the personal revealer of His presence and nature. His functions correspond to those of the Word in John's Gospel, and these, conjoined with the supremacy indicated in his name, suggest that "*the* Angel of the Lord" is, in fact, the everlasting Son of the Father, through whom the Christology of the New Testament teaches that all Revelation has been mediated. The psalmist did not know the full force of the name, but he believed that there was a Person, in an eminent and singular sense God's messenger, who would cast his

protection round the devout, and bid inferior heavenly beings draw their impregnable ranks about them. Christians can tell more than he could, of the Bearer of the name. It becomes them to be all the surer of His protection.

Just as the vow of ver. 1 passed into invocation, so does the personal experience of vv. 4–7 glide into exhortation. If such be the experience of poor men, trusting in Jehovah, how should the sharers in it be able to withhold themselves from calling on others to take their part in the joy? The depth of a man's religion may be roughly, but on the whole fairly, tested by his irrepressible impulse to bring other men to the fountain from which he has drunk. Very significantly does the psalm call on men to "taste and see," for in religion experience must precede knowledge. The way to "taste" is to "trust" or to "take refuge in" Jehovah. "Crede et manducasti," says Augustine. The psalm said it before him. Just as the act of appealing to Jehovah was described in a threefold way in vv. 4–6, so a threefold designation of devout men occurs in vv. 8–10. They "trust," are "saints," they "seek." Faith, consecration and aspiration are their marks. These are the essentials of the religious life, whatever be the degree of revelation. These were its essentials in the psalmist's time, and they are so to-day. As abiding as they, are the blessings consequent. These may all be summed up in one—the satisfaction of every need and desire. There are two ways of seeking for satisfaction: that of effort, violence and reliance on one's own teeth and claws to get one's meat; the other that of patient, submissive trust. Were there lions prowling round the camp at Adullam, and did the psalmist take their growls as typical of all vain

attempts to satisfy the soul? Struggle and force and self-reliant efforts leave men gaunt and hungry. He who takes the path of trust and has his supreme desires set on God, and who looks to Him to give what he himself cannot wring out of life, will get first his deepest desires answered in possessing God, and will then find that the One great Good is an encyclopædia of separate goods. They that "seek Jehovah" shall assuredly find Him, and in Him everything. He is multiform, and His goodness takes many shapes, according to the curves of the vessels which it fills. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God . . . and all these things shall be added unto you."

The mention of the "fear of the Lord" prepares the way for the transition to the third part of the psalm. It is purely didactic, and, in its simple moral teaching and familiar contrast of the fates of righteous and ungodly, has affinities with the Book of Proverbs; but these are not so special as to require the supposition of contemporaneousness. It is unfashionable now to incline to the Davidic authorship; but would not the supposition that the "children," who are to be taught the elements of religion, are the band of outlaws who have gathered round the fugitive, give appropriateness to the transition from the thanksgiving of the first part to the didactic tone of the second? We can see them sitting round the singer in the half-darkness of the cave, a wild group, needing much control and yet with faithful hearts, and loyal to their leader, who now tells them the laws of his camp, at the same time as he sets forth the broad principles of that morality, which is the garment and manifestation among men of the "fear of the Lord." The relations of religion and morals were never more clearly and strikingly expressed than in the simple

language of this psalm, which puts the substance of many profound treatises in a nutshell, when it expounds the "fear of Jehovah" as consisting in speaking truth, doing good, abhorring evil and seeking peace even when it seems to flee from us. The primal virtues are the same for all ages and stages of revelation. The definition of good and evil may vary and become more spiritual and inward, but the dictum that it is good to love and do good shines unalterable. The psalmist's belief that doing good was the sure way to enjoy good was a commonplace of Old Testament teaching, and under a Theocracy was more distinctly verified by outward facts than now; but even then, as many psalms show, had exceptions so stark as to stir many doubts. Unquestionably good in the sense of blessedness is inseparable from good in the sense of righteousness, as evil which is suffering is from evil which is sin, but the conception of what constitutes blessedness and sorrow must be modified so as to throw most weight on inward experiences, if such necessary coincidence is to be maintained in the face of patent facts.

The psalmist closes his song with a bold statement of the general principle that goodness is blessedness and wickedness is wretchedness; but he finds his proof mainly in the contrasted relation to Jehovah involved in the two opposite moral conditions. He has no vulgar conception of blessedness as resulting from circumstances. The loving-kindness of Jehovah is, in his view, prosperity, whatever be the aspect of externals. So with bold symbols, the very grossness of the letter of which shields them from misinterpretation, he declares this as the secret of all blessedness, that Jehovah's eyes are towards the righteous and His ears open to their cry. The individual experiences of

vv. 5 and 6 are generalised. The eye of God—*i.e.* His loving observance—rests upon and blesses those whose faces are turned to Him, and His ear hears the poor man's cry. The grim antithesis, which contains in itself the seeds of all unrest, is that the "face of Jehovah"—*i.e.* His manifested presence, the same face in the reflected light of which the faces of the righteous are lit up with gladness and dawning glory—is against evil doers. The moral condition of the beholder determines the operation of the light of God's countenance upon him. The same presence is light and darkness, life and death. Evil and its doers shrivel and perish in its beams, as the sunshine kills creatures whose haunt is the dark, or as Apollo's keen light-arrows slew the monsters of the slime. All else follows from this double relationship.

The remainder of the psalm runs out into a detailed description of the joyful fate of the lovers of good, broken only by one tragic verse (21), like a black rock in the midst of a sunny stream, telling how evil and evil-doers end. In ver. 17, as in ver. 5, the verb has no subject expressed, but the supplement of A.V. and R.V, "the righteous," is naturally drawn from the context and is found in the LXX., whether as part of the original text, or as supplement thereto, is unknown. The construction may, as in ver. 6, indicate that whoever cries to Jehovah is heard. Hitzig and others propose to transpose vv. 15 and 16, so as to get a nearer subject for the verb in the "righteous" of ver. 15, and defend the inversion by referring to the alphabetic order in Lam. ii., iii., iv., where similarly Pe precedes Ayin; but the present order of verses is better as putting the principal theme of this part of the psalm —the blessedness of the righteous—in the foreground,

and the opposite thought as its foil. The main thought of vv. 17–20 is nothing more than the experience of vv. 4–7 thrown into the form of general maxims. They are the commonplaces of religion, but come with strange freshness to a man, when they have been verified in his life. Happy they who can cast their personal experience into such proverbial sayings, and, having by faith individualised the general promises, can re-generalise the individual experience! The psalmist does not promise untroubled outward good. His anticipation is of troubled lives, delivered because of crying to Jehovah. "Many are the afflictions," but more are the deliverances. Many are the blows and painful is the pressure, but they break no bones, though they rack and wrench the frame. Significant, too, is the sequence of synonyms—righteous, broken-hearted, crushed in spirit, servants, them that take refuge in Jehovah. The first of these refers mainly to conduct, the second to that submission of will and spirit which sorrow rightly borne brings about, substantially equivalent to "the humble" or "afflicted" of vv. 2 and 6, the third again deals mostly with practice, and the last touches the foundation of all service, submission, and righteousness, as laid in the act of faith in Jehovah.

The last group of vv. 21, 22, puts the teaching of the psalm in one terrible contrast, "Evil shall slay the wicked." It were a mere platitude if by "evil" were meant misfortune. The same thought of the inseparable connection of the two senses of that word, which runs through the context, is here expressed in the most terse fashion. To do evil is to suffer evil, and all sin is suicide. Its wages is death. Every sin is a strand in the hangman's rope, which the sinner nooses and puts round his own neck. That is so because every sin

brings guilt, and guilt brings retribution. Much more than "desolate" is meant in vv. 21 and 22. The word means *to be condemned* or *held guilty*. Jehovah is the Judge; before His bar all actions and characters are set: His unerring estimate of each brings with it, here and now, consequences of reward and punishment which prophesy a future, more perfect judgment. The redemption of the soul of God's servants is the antithesis to that awful experience; and they only, who take refuge in Him, escape it. The full Christian significance of this final contrast is in the Apostle's words, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus."

PSALM XXXV.

1 Plead my cause, Jehovah, with those who plead against me;
Fight with those who fight with me.
2 Grasp target and shield,
And stand up in my help,
3 And unsheathe lance and battle-axe (?) against my pursuers;
Say to my soul, Thy salvation am I.

4 Be the seekers after my life put to shame and dishonoured;
Be the plotters of my hurt turned back and confounded
5 Be they as chaff before the wind,
And the angel of Jehovah striking them down!
6 Be their path darkness and slipperiness,
And the angel of Jehovah pursuing them!

7 For without provocation have they hidden for me their net;
Without provocation have they dug a pit for my life.
8 May destruction light on him unawares,
And his net which he hath hidden snare him;
Into destruction (the pit?)—may he fall therein!

9 And my soul shall exult in Jehovah,
Shall rejoice in His salvation.
10 All my bones shall say, Jehovah, who is like Thee,
Delivering the afflicted from a stronger than he,
Even the afflicted and poor from his spoiler?

11 Unjust witnesses rise up;
Of what I know not they ask me.
12 They requite me evil for good—
Bereavement to my soul!
13 But I—in their sickness my garment was sackcloth,
I afflicted my soul by fasting,
And my prayer—may it return again (do thou return?) to my own bosom.
14 As [for] my friend or brother, I dragged myself about (bowed myself down?);
As one mourning for a mother, I bowed down (dragged myself about?) in squalid attire.

15 And at my tottering they rejoice and assemble themselves;
Abjects and those whom I know not assemble against me;
They tear me, and cease not,
16 Like the profanest of buffoons for a bit of bread,
Gnashing their teeth at me.

17 Lord, how long wilt Thou look on?
Bring back my soul from their destructions,
My only one from the young lions.
18 I will praise Thee in the great congregation;
Among people strong [in number] will I sound Thy praise.

19 Let not my enemies wrongfully rejoice over me,
Nor my haters without provocation wink the eye.
20 For it is not peace they speak,
And against the quiet of the land they plan words of guile.
21 And they open wide their mouth against me;
They say, Oho! Oho! our eyes have seen.

22 Thou hast seen, Jehovah: be not deaf;
Lord, be not far from me!
23 Arouse Thyself, and awake for my judgment,
My God and my Lord, for my suit!
24 Judge me according to Thy righteousness, Jehovah, my God,
And let them not rejoice over me.

25 Let them not say in their hearts, Oho! our desire!
Let them not say, We have swallowed him.
26 Be those who rejoice over my calamity put to shame and confounded together!
Be those who magnify themselves against me clothed in shame and dishonour!

27 May those who delight in my righteous cause sound out their gladness and rejoice,
And say continually, Magnified be Jehovah,
Who delights in the peace of His servant.
28 And my tongue shall meditate Thy righteousness,
All day long Thy praise.

THE psalmist's life is in danger. He is the victim of ungrateful hatred. False accusations of crimes that he never dreamed of are brought against him. He professes innocence, and appeals to Jehovah to be his

Advocate and also his Judge. The prayer in ver. 1 *a* uses the same word and metaphor as David does in his remonstrance with Saul (1 Sam. xxiv. 15). The correspondence with David's situation in the Sauline persecution is, at least, remarkable, and goes far to sustain the Davidic authorship. The distinctly individual traits in the psalm are difficulties in the way of regarding it as a national psalm. Jeremiah has several coincidences in point of expression and sentiment, which are more naturally accounted for as reminiscences by the prophet than as indications that he was the psalmist. His genius was assimilative, and liked to rest itself on earlier utterances.

The psalm has three parts, all of substantially the same import, and marked off by the conclusion of each being a vow of praise and the main body of each being a cry for deliverance, a characterisation of the enemy as ungrateful and malicious, and a profession of the singer's innocence. We do not look for melodious variations of note in a cry for help. The only variety to be expected is in its shrill intensity and prolongation. The triple division is in accordance with the natural feeling of completeness attaching to the number. If there is any difference between the three sets of petitions, it may be observed that the first (vv. 1–10) alleges innocence and vows praise without reference to others; that the second (vv. 11–18) rises to a profession not only of innocence, but of beneficence and affection met by hate, and ends with a vow of public praise; and that the final section (vv. 19–28) has less description of the machinations of the enemy and more prolonged appeal to Jehovah for His judgment, and ends, not with a solo of the psalmist's gratitude, but with a chorus of his friends, praising God for his "prosperity."

The most striking features of the first part are the boldness of the appeal to Jehovah to fight for the psalmist and the terrible imprecations and magnificent picture in vv. 5, 6. The relation between the two petitions of ver. 1, "Plead with those who plead against the" and "Fight with them that fight against me," may be variously determined. Both may be figurative, the former drawn from legal processes, the latter from the battle-field. But more probably the psalmist was really the object of armed attack, and the "fighting" was a grim reality. The suit against him was being carried on, not in a court, but in the field. The rendering of the R.V. in ver. 1, "Strive with . . . who strive against me," obscures the metaphor of a lawsuit, which, in view of its further expansion in vv. 23, 24 (and in "witnesses" in ver. 11 ?), is best retained. That is a daring flight of reverent imagination which thinks of the armed Jehovah as starting to His feet to help one poor man. The attitude anticipates Stephen's vision of "the Son of man standing," not throned in rest, but risen in eager sympathy and intent to succour. But the panoply in which the psalmist's faith arrays Jehovah, is purely imaginative and, of course, has nothing parallel in the martyr's vision. The "target" was smaller than the "shield" (2 Chron. ix. 15, 16). Both could not be wielded at once, but the incongruity helps to idealise the bold imagery and to emphasise the Divine completeness of protecting power. It is the psalmist, and not his heavenly Ally, who is to be sheltered. The two defensive weapons are probably matched by two offensive ones in ver. 3. The word rendered in the A.V. "stop" ("the way" being a supplement) is more probably to be taken as the name of a weapon, a battle-axe according to some, a dirk or dagger according to others. The

ordinary translation gives a satisfactory sense, but the other is more in accordance with the following preposition, with the accents, and with the parallelism of target and shield. In either case, how beautifully the spiritual reality breaks through the warlike metaphor! This armed Jehovah, grasping shield and drawing spear, utters no battle shout, but whispers consolation to the trembling man crouching behind his shield. The outward side of the Divine activity, turned to the foe, is martial and menacing; the inner side is full of tender, secret breathings of comfort and love.

The previous imagery of the battle-field and the Warrior God moulds the terrible wishes in vv. 4–6, which should not be interpreted as having a wider reference than to the issue of the attacks on the psalmist. The substance of them is nothing more than the obverse of his wish for his own deliverance, which necessarily is accomplished by the defeat of his enemies. The "moral difficulty" of such wishes is not removed by restricting them to the special matter in hand, but it is unduly aggravated if they are supposed to go beyond it. However restricted, they express a stage of feeling far beneath the Christian, and the attempt to slur over the contrast is in danger of hiding the glory of midday for fear of not doing justice to the beauty of morning twilight. It is true that the "imprecations" of the Psalter are not the offspring of passion, and that the psalmists speak as identifying their cause with God's; but when all such considerations are taken into account, these prayers against enemies remain distinctly inferior to the code of Christian ethics. The more frankly the fact is recognised, the better. But, if we turn from the moral to the poetic side of these verses, what stern beauty there is in that awful picture

of the fleeing foe, with the angel of Jehovah pressing hard on their broken ranks! The hope which has been embodied in the legends of many nations, that the gods were seen fighting for their worshippers, is the psalmist's faith, and in its essence is ever true. That angel, whom we heard of in the previous psalm as defending the defenceless encampment of them that fear Jehovah, fights with and scatters the enemies like chaff before the wind. One more touch of terror is added in that picture of flight in the dark, on a slippery path, with the celestial avenger close on the fugitives' heels, as when the Amorite kings fled down the pass of Beth-horon, and "Jehovah cast great stones from heaven upon them." Æschylus or Dante has nothing more concentrated or suggestive of terror and beauty than this picture.

The psalmist's consciousness of innocence is the ground of his prayer and confidence. Causeless hatred is the lot of the good in this evil world. Their goodness is cause enough; for men's likes and dislikes follow their moral character. Virtue rebukes, and even patient endurance irritates. No hostility is so hard to turn into love as that which has its origin, not in the attitude of its object, but in instinctive consciousness of contrariety in the depths of the soul. Whoever wills to live near God and tries to shape his life accordingly may make up his mind to be the mark for many arrows of popular dislike, sometimes lightly tipped with ridicule, sometimes dipped in gall, sometimes steeped in poison, but always sharpened by hostility. The experience is too uniform to identify the poet by it, but the correspondence with David's tone in his remonstrances with Saul is, at least, worthy of consideration. The familiar figures of the hunter's snare and pitfall

recur here, as expressing crafty plans for destruction, and pass, as in other places, into the wish that the lex talionis may fall on the would-be ensnarer. The text appears to be somewhat dislocated and corrupted in vv. 7, 8. The word "pit" is needless in ver. 7 *a*, since snares are not usually spread in pits, and it is wanted in the next clause, and should therefore probably be transposed. Again, the last clause of ver. 8, whether the translation of the A.V. or of the R.V. be adopted, is awkward and feeble from the repetition of "destruction," but if we read "pit," which involves only a slight change of letters, we avoid tautology, and preserve the reference to the two engines of craft: "Let his net which he spread catch him; in the pit—let him fall therein!" The enemy's fall is the occasion of glad praise, not because his intended victim yields to the temptation to take malicious delight in his calamity (*Schadenfreude*). His own deliverance, not the other's destruction, makes the singer joyful in Jehovah, and what he vows to celebrate is not the retributive, but the delivering, aspect of the Divine act. In such joy there is nothing unworthy of the purest forgiving love to foes. The relaxation of the tension of anxiety and fear brings the sweetest moments, in the sweetness of which soul and body seem to share, and the very bones, which were consumed and waxed old (vi. 3, xxxii. 3), are at ease, and, in their sense of well-being, have a tongue to ascribe it to Jehovah's delivering hand. No physical enjoyment surpasses the delight of simple freedom from long torture of pain, nor are there many experiences so poignantly blessed as that of passing out of tempest into calm. Well for those who deepen and hallow such joy by turning it into praise, and see even in the experiences of their little lives tokens of the incompar-

able greatness and unparalleled love of their delivering God!

Once more the singer plunges into the depths, not because his faith fails to sustain him on the heights which it had won, but because it would travel the road again, in order to strengthen itself by persistent prayers which are not "vain repetitions." The second division (vv. 11–18) runs parallel with the first, with some differences. The reference to "unjust witnesses" and their charges of crimes which he had never dreamed of may be but the reappearance of the image of a law-suit, as in ver. 1, but is more probably fact. We may venture to think of the slanders which poisoned Saul's too jealous mind, just as in "They requite me evil for good" we have at least a remarkable verbal coincidence with the latter's burst of tearful penitence (1 Sam. xxiv. 17): "Thou art more righteous than I, for thou hast rendered unto me good, whereas I have rendered unto thee evil." What a wail breaks the continuity of the sentence in the pathetic words of ver. 12 *b*!—"Bereavement to my soul!" The word is used again in Isa. xlviii. 7, 8, and there is translated "loss of children." The forlorn man felt as if all whom he loved were swept away, and he left alone to face the storm. The utter loneliness of sorrow was never more vividly expressed. The interjected clause sounds like an agonised cry forced from a man on the rack. Surely we hear in it not the voice of a personified nation, but of an individual sufferer, and if we have been down into the depths ourselves, we recognise the sound. The consciousness of innocence marking the former section becomes now the assertion of active sympathy, met by ungrateful hate. The power of kindness is great, but there are ill-conditioned souls which resent it. There is too

much truth in the cynical belief that the sure way to make an enemy is to do a kindness. It is all too common an experience that the more abundantly one loves, the less he is loved. The highest degree of unrequited participation in others' sorrows is seen in Him who "Himself took our sicknesses." This psalmist so shared in those of his foes that in sackcloth and with fasting he prayed for their healing. Whether the prayer was answered to them or not, it brought reflex blessing to him, for self-forgetting sympathy is never waste, even though it does not secure returns of gratitude. "Your peace shall return to you again," though it may not bring peace to nor with a jangling household. Riehm (in Hupfeld) suggests the transposition of the verbs in 14 *a* and *b*: "I *bowed down* as though he had been my friend or brother; I *went* in mourning," etc., the former clause painting the drooping head of a mourner, the latter his slow walk and sad attire, either squalid or black.

The reverse of this picture of true sympathy is given in the conduct of its objects when it was the psalmist's turn to sorrow. Gleefully they flock together to mock and triumph. His calamity was as good as a feast to the ingrates. Vv. 15 and 16 are in parts obscure, but the general sense is clear. The word rendered "abjects" is unique, and consequently its meaning is doubtful, and various conjectural emendations have been proposed—*e.g.*, "foreigners," which, as Hupfeld says, is "as foreign to the connection as can be," "smiting," and others—but the rendering "abjects," or men of low degree, gives an intelligible meaning. The comparison in ver. 16 *a* is extremely obscure. The existing text is harsh; "profane of mockers for a cake" needs much explanation to be intelligible. "Mockers for a cake"

are usually explained to be hangers-on at feasts who found wit for dull guests and were paid by a share of good things, or who crept into favour and entertainment by slandering the objects of the host's dislike. Another explanation, suggested by Hupfeld as an alternative, connects the word rendered "mockers" with the imagery in "tear" (ver. 15) and "gnash" (ver. 16) and "swallow" (ver. 25), and by an alteration of one letter gets the rendering "like profane cake-devourers," so comparing the enemies to greedy gluttons, to whom the psalmist's ruin is a dainty morsel eagerly devoured.

The picture of his danger is followed, as in the former part, by the psalmist's prayer. To him God's beholding without interposing is strange, and the time seems protracted; for the moments creep when sorrow-laden, and God's help seems slow to tortured hearts. But the impatience which speaks of itself to Him is soothed, and, though the man who cries, *How long?* may feel that his life lies as among lions, he will swiftly change his note of petition into thanksgiving. The designation of the life as "my only one," as in xxii. 20, enhances the earnestness of petition by the thought that, once lost, it can never be restored. A man has but one life; therefore he holds it so dear. The mercy implored for the single soul will be occasion of praise before many people. Not now, as in vv. 9, 10, is the thankfulness a private soliloquy. Individual blessings should be publicly acknowledged, and the praise accruing thence may be used as a plea with God, who delivers men that they may "show forth the excellencies of Him who hath called them out of" trouble into His marvellous peace.

The third division (ver. 18 to end) goes over nearly the same ground as before, with the difference that the

prayer for deliverance is more extended, and that the resulting praise comes from the great congregation, joining in as chorus in the singer's solo. The former references to innocence and causeless hatred, lies and plots, open-mouthed rage, are repeated. "Our eyes have seen," say the enemies, counting their plots as good as successful and snorting contempt of their victim's helplessness; but he bethinks him of another eye, and grandly opposes God's sight to theirs. Usually that Jehovah sees is, in the Psalter, the same as His helping; but here, as in ver. 17, the two things are separated, as they so often are, in fact, for the trial of faith. God's inaction does not disprove His knowledge, but the pleading soul presses on Him His knowledge as a plea that He would not be deaf to its cry nor far from its help. The greedy eyes of the enemy round the psalmist gloat on their prey; but he cries aloud to his God, and dares to speak to Him as if He were deaf and far off, inactive and asleep. The imagery of the lawsuit reappears in fuller form here. "My cause" in ver. 23 is a noun cognate with the verb rendered "plead" or "strive" in ver. 1; "Judge me" in ver. 24 does not mean, Pronounce sentence on my character and conduct, but, Do me right in this case of mine *versus* my gratuitous foes.

Again recurs the prayer for their confusion, which clearly has no wider scope than concerning the matter in hand. It is no breach of Christian charity to pray that hostile devices may fail. The vivid imagination of the poet hears the triumphant exclamations of gratified hatred: "Oho! our desire!" "We have swallowed him," and sums up the character of his enemies in the two traits of malicious joy in his hurt and self exaltation in their hostility to him.

At last the prayer, which has run through so many moods of feeling, settles itself into restful contemplation of the sure results of Jehovah's sure deliverance. One receives the blessing; many rejoice in it. In significant antithesis to the enemies' joy is the joy of the rescued man's lovers and favourers. Their "saying" stands over against the silenced boastings of the losers of the suit. The latter "magnified themselves," but the end of Jehovah's deliverance will be that true hearts will "magnify" Him. The victor in the cause will give all the praise to the Judge, and he and his friends will unite in self-oblivious praise. Those who delight in his righteousness are of one mind with Jehovah, and magnify Him because He "delights in the peace of His servant." While they ring out their praises, the humble suppliant, whose cry has brought the Divine act which has waked all this surging song, "shall musingly speak in the low murmur of one entranced by a sweet thought" (Cheyne), or, if we might use a fine old word, shall "croon" over God's righteousness all the day long. That is the right end of mercies received. Whether there be many voices to join in praise or no, one voice should not be silent, that of the receiver of the blessings, and, even when he pauses in his song, his heart should keep singing day-long and life-long praises.

PSALM XXXVI.

1 The wicked has an Oracle of Transgression within his heart;
There is no fear of God before his eyes.
2 For it speaks smooth things to him in his imagination (eyes)
As to finding out his iniquity, as to hating [it].

3 The words of his mouth are iniquity and deceit;
He has ceased being wise, doing good.
4 He plots mischief upon his bed;
He sets himself firmly in a way [that is] not good;
Evil he loathes not.

5 Jehovah, Thy loving-kindness is in the heavens,
Thy faithfulness is unto the clouds.
6 Thy righteousness is like the mountains of God,
Thy judgments a mighty deep;
Man and beast preservest Thou, Jehovah.

7 How precious is Thy loving-kindness, Jehovah, O God!
And the sons of men in the shadow of Thy wings take refuge.
8 They are satisfied from the fatness of Thy house,
And [of] the river of Thy delights Thou givest them to drink.
9 For with Thee is the fountain of life;
In Thy light do we see light.

10 Continue Thy loving-kindness to those who know Thee,
And Thy righteousness to the upright in heart.
11 Let not the foot of pride come against me,
And the hand of the wicked—let it not drive me forth.

12 There the workers of iniquity are fallen;
They are struck down, and are not able to rise.

THE supposition that the sombre picture of "the wicked" in vv. 1–4 was originally unconnected with the glorious hymn in vv. 5–9 fails to give weight to the difference between the sober pace of pedestrian

prose and the swift flight of winged poetry. It fails also in apprehending the instinctive turning of a devout meditative spectator from the darkness of earth and its sins to the light above. The one refuge from the sad vision of evil here is in the faith that God is above it all, and that His name is Mercy. Nor can the blackness of the one picture be anywhere so plainly seen as when it is set in front of the brightness of the other. A religious man, who has laid to heart the miserable sights of which earth is full, will scarcely think that the psalmist's quick averting of his eyes from these to steep them in the light of God is unnatural, or that the original connection of the two parts of this psalm is an artificial supposition. Besides this, the closing section of prayer is tinged with references to the first part, and derives its *raison d'être* from it. The three parts form an organic whole.

The gnarled obscurity of the language in which the "wicked" is described corresponds to the theme, and contrasts strikingly with the limpid flow of the second part. "The line, too, labours" as it tries to tell the dark thoughts that move to dark deeds. Vv. 1, 2, unveil the secret beliefs of the sinner, vv. 3, 4, his consequent acts. As the text stands, it needs much torturing to get a tolerable meaning out of ver. 1, and the slight alteration, found in the LXX. and in some old versions, of "his heart" instead of "my heart" smooths the difficulty. We have then a bold personification of "Transgression" as speaking in the secret heart of the wicked, as in some dark cave, such as heathen oracle-mongers haunted. There is bitter irony in using the sacred word which stamped the prophets' utterances, and which we may translate "oracle," for the godless lies muttered in the sinner's heart. This

is the account of how men come to do evil: that there is a voice within whispering falsehood. And the reason why that bitter voice has the shrine to itself is that "there is no fear of God before" the man's "eyes." The two clauses of ver. 1 are simply set side by side, leaving the reader to spell out their logical relation. Possibly the absence of the fear of God may be regarded as both the occasion and the result of the oracle of Transgression, since, in fact, it is both. Still more obscure is ver. 2. Who is the "flatterer"? The answers are conflicting. The "wicked," say some, but if so, "in his own eyes" is superfluous; "God," say others, but that requires a doubtful meaning for "flatters"—namely, "treats gently"—and is open to the same objection as the preceding in regard to "in his own eyes." The most natural supposition is that "transgression," which was represented in ver. 1 as speaking, is here also meant. Clearly the person in whose eyes the flattery is real is the wicked, and therefore its speaker must be another. "Sin beguiled me," says Paul, and therein echoes this psalmist. Transgression in its oracle is one of "those juggling fiends that palter with us in a double sense," promising delights and impunity. But the closing words of ver. 2 are a crux. Conjectural emendations have been suggested, but do not afford much help. Probably the best way is to take the text as it stands, and make the best of it. The meaning it yields is harsh, but tolerable: "to find out his sin, to hate" (it?). Who finds out sin? God. If He is the finder, it is He who also "hates"; and if it is sin that is the object of the one verb, it is most natural to suppose it that of the other also. The two verbs are infinitives, with the preposition of purpose or of reference prefixed. Either

meaning is allowable. If the preposition is taken as implying reference, the sense will be that the glosing whispers of sin deceive a man in regard to the discovery of his wrong-doing and God's displeasure at it. Impunity is promised, and God's holiness is smoothed down. If, on the other hand, the idea of purpose is adopted, the solemn thought emerges that the oracle is spoken with intent to ruin the deluded listener and set his secret sins in the condemning light of God's face. Sin is cruel, and a traitor. This profound glimpse into the depths of a soul without the fear of God is followed by the picture of the consequences of such practical atheism, as seen in conduct. It is deeply charged with blackness and unrelieved by any gleam of light. Falsehood, abandonment of all attempts to do right, insensibility to the hallowing influences of nightly solitude, when men are wont to see their evil more clearly in the dark, like phosphorus streaks on the wall, obstinate planting the feet in ways not good, a silenced conscience which has no movement of aversion to evil—these are the fruits of that oracle of Trangression when it has its perfect work. We may call such a picture the idealisation of the character described, but there have been men who realised it, and the warning is weighty that such a uniform and all-enwrapping darkness is the terrible goal towards which all listening to that bitter voice tends. No wonder that the psalmist wrenches himself swiftly away from such a sight!

The two strophes of the second division (vv. 5, 6, and 7–9) present the glorious realities of the Divine name in contrast with the false oracle of vv. 1, 2, and the blessedness of God's guests in contrast with the gloomy picture of the "wicked" in vv. 3, 4. It is noteworthy

that the first and last-named "attributes" are the same. "Loving-kindness" begins and ends the glowing series That stooping, active love encloses, like a golden circlet, all else that men can know or say of the perfection whose name is God. It is the white beam into which all colours melt, and from which all are evolved. As science feels after the reduction of all forms of physical energy to one, for which there is no name but energy, all the adorable glories of God pass into one, which He has bidden us call love. "Thy loving-kindness is in the heavens," towering on high. It is like some Divine æther, filling all space. The heavens are the home of light. They arch above every head; they rim every horizon; they are filled with nightly stars; they open into abysses as the eye gazes; they bend unchanged and untroubled above a weary earth; from them fall benedictions of rain and sunshine. All these subordinate allusions may lie in the psalmist's thought, while its main intention is to magnify the greatness of that mercy as heaven-high.

But mercy standing alone might seem to lack a guarantee of its duration, and therefore the strength of "faithfulness," unalterable continuance in a course begun, and adherence to every promise either spoken in words or implied in creation or providence, is added to the tenderness of mercy. The boundlessness of that faithfulness is the main thought, but the contrast of the whirling, shifting clouds with it is striking. The realm of eternal purpose and enduring act reaches to and stretches above the lower region where change rules.

But a third glory has yet to be flashed before glad eyes, God's "righteousness," which here is not merely nor mainly punitive, but delivering, or, perhaps in a still wider view, the perfect conformity of His nature

with the ideal of ethical completeness. Right is the same for heaven as for earth, and "whatsoever things are just" have their home in the bosom of God. The point of comparison with "the mountains of God" is, as in the previous clauses, their loftiness, which expresses greatness and elevation above our reach; but the subsidiary ideas of permanence and sublimity are not to be overlooked. "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but His righteousness endures for ever." There is safe hiding there, in the fastnesses of that everlasting hill. From character the psalmist passes to acts, and sets all the Divine dealings forth under the one category of "judgments," the utterances in act of His judicial estimate of men. Mountains seem highest and ocean broadest when the former rise sheer from the water's edge, as Carmel does. The immobility of the silent hills is wonderfully contrasted with the ever-moving sea, which to the Hebrew was the very home of mystery. The obscurity of the Divine judgments is a subject of praise, if we hold fast by faith in God's loving-kindness, faithfulness, and righteousness. They are obscure by reason of their vast scale, which permits the vision of only a fragment. How little of the ocean is seen from any shore! But there is no arbitrary obscurity. The sea is "of glass mingled with fire"; and if the eye cannot pierce its depths, it is not because of any darkening impurity in the crystal clearness, but simply because not even light can travel to the bottom. The higher up on the mountains men go, the deeper down can they see into that ocean. It is a hymn, not an indictment, which says, "Thy judgments are a great deep." But however the heights tower and the abysses open, there is a strip of green,

solid earth on which "man and beast" live in safe plenty. The plain blessings of an all-embracing providence should make it easier to believe in the unmingled goodness of acts which are too vast for men to judge and of that mighty name which towers above their conceptions. What they see is goodness; what they cannot see must be of a piece. The psalmist is in "that serene and blessed mood" when the terrible mysteries of creation and providence do not interfere with his "steadfast faith that all which he beholds is full of blessings." There are times when these mysteries press with agonising force on devout souls, but there should also be moments when the pure love of the perfectly good God is seen to fill all space and outstretch all dimensions of height and depth and breadth. The awful problems of pain and death will be best dealt with by those who can echo the rapture of this psalm.

If God is such, what is man's natural attitude to so great and sweet a name? Glad wonder, accepting His gift as the one precious thing, and faith sheltering beneath the great shadow of His outstretched wing. The exclamation in ver. 8, "How precious is Thy loving-kindness!" expresses not only its intrinsic value, but the devout soul's appreciation of it. The secret of blessedness and test of true wisdom lie in a sane estimate of the worth of God's loving-kindness as compared with all other treasures. Such an estimate leads to trust in Him, as the psalmist implies by his juxtaposition of the two clauses of ver. 7, though he connects them, not by an expressed "therefore," but by the simple copula. The representation of trust as taking refuge reappears here, with its usual suggestions of haste and peril. The "wing" of God suggests tenderness and security. And the reason for trust is

enforced in the designation "sons of men," partakers of weakness and mortality, and therefore needing the refuge which, in the wonderfulness of His loving-kindness, they find under the pinions of so great a God.

The psalm follows the refugees into their hiding-place, and shows how much more than bare shelter they find there. They are God's guests, and royally entertained as such. The joyful priestly feasts in the Temple colour the metaphor, but the idea of hospitable reception of guests is the more prominent. The psalmist speaks the language of that true and wholesome mysticism without which religion is feeble and formal. The root ideas of his delineation of the blessedness of the fugitives to God are their union with God and possession of Him. Such is the magical might of lowly trust that by it weak dying "sons of men" are so knit to the God whose glories the singer has been celebrating that they partake of Himself and are saturated with His sufficiency, drink of His delights in some deep sense, bathe in the fountain of life, and have His light for their organ and medium and object of sight. These great sentences beggar all exposition. They touch on the rim of infinite things, whereof only the nearer fringe comes within our ken in this life. The soul that lives in God is satisfied, having real possession of the only adequate object. The variety of desires, appetites, and needs requires manifoldness in their food, but the unity of our nature demands that all that manifoldness should be in One. Multiplicity in objects, aims, loves, is misery; oneness is blessedness. We need a lasting good and an ever-growing one to meet and unfold the capacity of indefinite growth. Nothing but God can satisfy the narrowest human capacity.

Union with Him is the source of all delight, as of

all true fruition of desires. Possibly a reference to Eden may be intended in the selection of the word for "pleasures," which is a cognate with that name. So there may be allusion to the river which watered that garden, and the thought may be that the present life of the guest of God is not all unlike the delights of that vanished paradise. We may perhaps scarcely venture on supposing that "Thy pleasures" means those which the blessed God Himself possesses; but even if we take the lower and safer meaning of those which God gives, we may bring into connection Christ's own gift to His disciples of His own peace, and His assurance that faithful servants will "enter into the joy of their Lord." Shepherd and sheep drink of the same brook by the way and of the same living fountains above. The psalmist's conception of religion is essentially joyful. No doubt there are sources of sadness peculiar to a religious man, and he is necessarily shut out from much of the effervescent poison of earthly joys drugged with sin. Much in his life is inevitably grave, stern, and sad. But the sources of joy opened are far deeper than those that are closed. Surface wells (many of them little better than open sewers) may be shut up, but an unfailing stream is found in the desert. Satisfaction and joy flow from God, because life and light are with Him; and therefore he who is with Him has them for his. "With Thee is the fountain of life" is true in every sense of the word "life." In regard to life natural, the saying embodies a loftier conception of the Creator's relation to the creature than the mechanical notion of creation. The fountain pours its waters into stream or basin, which it keeps full by continual flow. Stop the efflux, and these are dried up. So the great mystery of life in all its forms is as a

spark from a fire, a drop from a fountain, or, as Scripture puts it in regard to man, a breath from God's own lips. In a very real sense, wherever life is, there God is, and only by some form of union with Him or by the presence of His power, which is Himself, do creatures live. But the psalm is dealing with the blessings belonging to those who trust beneath the shadow of God's wing; therefore life here, in this verse, is no equivalent to mere existence, physical or self-conscious, but it must be taken in its highest spiritual sense. Union with God is its condition, and that union is brought to pass by taking refuge with Him. The deep words anticipated the explicit teaching of the Gospel in so far as they proclaimed these truths, but the greatest utterance still remained unspoken: that this life is "in His Son."

Light and life are closely connected. Whether knowledge, purity, or joy is regarded as the dominant idea in the symbol, or whether all are united in it, the profound words of the psalm are true. In God's light we see light. In the lowest region "the seeing eye is from the Lord." "The inspiration of the Almighty giveth understanding." Faculty and medium of vision are both of Him. But hearts in communion with God are illumined, and they who are "in the light" cannot walk in darkness. Practical wisdom is theirs. The light of God, like the star of the Magi, stoops to guide pilgrims' steps. Clear certitude as to sovereign realities is the guerdon of the guests of God. Where other eyes see nothing but mists, they can discern solid land and the gleaming towers of the city across the sea. Nor is that light only the dry light by which we know, but it means purity and joy also; and to "see light" is to possess these too by derivation from the

purity and joy of God Himself. He is the "master light of all our seeing." The fountain has become a stream, and taken to itself movement towards men; for the psalmist's glowing picture is more than fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who has said, "I am the Light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

The closing division is prayer, based both upon the contemplation of God's attributes in vv. 5, 6, and of the wicked in the first part. This distinct reference to both the preceding sections is in favour of the original unity of the psalm. The belief in the immensity of Divine loving-kindness and righteousness inspires the prayer for their long-drawn-out (so "continue" means literally) continuance to the psalmist and his fellows. He will not separate himself from these in his petition, but thinks of them before himself. "Those who know Thee" are those who take refuge under the shadow of the great wing. Their knowledge is intimate, vital; it is acquaintanceship, not mere intellectual apprehension. It is such as to purge the heart and make its possessors upright. Thus we have set forth in that sequence of trust, knowledge, and uprightness stages of growing Godlikeness closely corresponding to the Gospel sequence of faith, love, and holiness. Such souls are *capaces Dei*, fit to receive the manifestations of God's loving-kindness and righteousness; and from such these will never remove. They will stand stable as His firm attributes, and the spurning foot of proud oppressors shall not trample on them, nor violent hands be able to stir them from their steadfast, secure place. The prayer of the psalm goes deeper than any mere deprecation of earthly removal, and is but prosaically understood, if thought to refer to exile

or the like. The dwelling-place from which it beseeches that the suppliant may never be removed is his safe refuge beneath the wing, or in the house, of God. Christ answered it when He said, "No man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." The one desire of the heart which has tasted the abundance, satisfaction, delights, fulness of life, and clearness of light that attend the presence of God is that nothing may draw it thence.

Prayer wins prophetic certitude. From his serene shelter under the wing, the suppliant looks out on the rout of baffled foes, and sees the end which gives the lie to the oracle of transgression and its flatteries. "They are struck down," the same word as in the picture of the pursuing angel of the Lord in Psalm xxxv. Here the agent of their fall is unnamed, but one power only can inflict such irrevocable ruin. God, who is the shelter of the upright in heart, has at last found out the sinners' iniquity, and His hatred of sin stands ready to "smite once, and smite no more."

PSALM XXXVII.

1 (א) Heat not thyself because of the evil-doers;
Be not envious because of the workers of perversity
2 For like grass shall they swiftly fade,
And like green herbage shall they wither.

3 (ב) Trust in Jehovah, and do good;
Inhabit the land, and feed on faithfulness
4 And delight thyself in Jehovah,
And He shall give thee the desires of thy heart.

5 (ג) Roll thy way upon Jehovah,
And trust in Him, and He shall do [all that thou dost need].
6 And He shall bring forth as the light thy righteousness,
And thy judgment as the noonday.

7 (ד) Be silent to Jehovah, and wait patiently for Him;
Heat not thyself because of him who makes his way prosperous,
Because of the man who carries out intrigues.

8 (ה) Cease from anger, and forsake wrath;
Heat not thyself: [it leads] only to doing evil.
9 For evil-doers shall be cut off;
And they who wait on Jehovah—they shall inherit the land.

10 (ו) And yet a little while, and the wicked is no more,
And thou shalt take heed to his place, and he is not [there].
11 And the meek shall inherit the land,
And delight themselves in the abundance of peace.

12 (ז) The wicked intrigues against the righteous,
And grinds his teeth at him.
13 The Lord laughs at him,
For He sees that his day is coming.

14 (ח) The wicked draw sword and bend their bow,
To slay the afflicted and poor,
To butcher the upright in way;
15 Their sword shall enter into their own heart,
And their bows shall be broken.

16 (ט) Better is the little of the righteous
Than the abundance of many wicked.
17 For the arms of the wicked shall be broken,
And Jehovah holds up the righteous.

18 (י) Jehovah has knowledge of the days of the perfect,
And their inheritance shall be for ever;
19 They shall not be put to shame in the time of evil,
And in the days of famine they shall be satisfied.

20 (כ) For the wicked shall perish,
And the enemies of Jehovah shall be like the beauty of the pastures;
They melt away in smoke: they melt away.

21 (ל) The wicked borrows, and does not pay;
And the righteous deals generously, and gives.
22 For His blessed ones shall inherit the earth,
And His cursed ones shall be cut off.

23 (מ) From Jehovah are a man's steps established,
And He delighteth in his way;
24 If he falls, he shall not lie prostrate,
For Jehovah holds up his hand.

25 (נ) A youth have I been, now I am old,
And I have not seen a righteous man forsaken,
Or his seed begging bread.
26 All day long he is dealing generously and lending,
And his seed is blessed.

27 (ס) Depart from evil, and do good;
And dwell for evermore.
28 For Jehovah loves judgment,
And forsakes not them whom He favours.

(ע) They are preserved for ever
(The unrighteous are destroyed for ever?),
And the seed of the wicked is cut off.
29 The righteous shall inherit the land,
And dwell thereon for ever.

30 (פ) The mouth of the righteous meditates wisdom,
And his tongue speaks judgment.
31 The law of his God is in his heart;
His steps shall not waver.

32 (ע) The wicked watches the righteous,
And seeks to slay him ;
33 Jehovah will not leave him in his hand,
And will not condemn him when he is judged.

34 (פ) Wait for Jehovah, and keep His way,
And He will exalt thee to inherit the land ;
When the wicked is cut off, thou shalt see [it].

35 (ר) I have seen the wicked terror-striking
And spreading himself abroad like [a tree] native to the soil [and] green.
36 And he passed (I passed by ?), and lo, he was not [there] :
And I sought for him, and he was not to be found.

37 (ש) Mark the perfect, and behold the upright ;
For there is a posterity to the man of peace.
38 And apostates are destroyed together ;
The posterity of the wicked is cut off.

39 (ת) And the salvation of the righteous is from Jehovah,
Their stronghold in time of trouble.
40 And Jehovah helps them and rescues them ;
He rescues them from the wicked, and saves them,
Because they take refuge in Him.

THERE is a natural connection between acrostic structure and didactic tone, as is shown in several instances, and especially in this psalm. The structure is on the whole regular, each second verse beginning with the required letter, but here and there the period is curtailed or elongated by one member. Such irregularities do not seem to mark stages in the thought or breaks in the sequence, but are simply reliefs to the monotony of the rhythm, like the shiftings of the place of the pause in blank verse, the management of which makes the difference between a master and a bungler. The psalm grapples with the problem which tried the faith of the Old Testament saints—namely, the apparent absence of correlation of conduct with condition—and solves it by the strong assertion of the

brevity of godless prosperity and the certainty that well-doing will lead to well-being. The principle is true absolutely in the long run, but there is no reference in the psalm to the future life. Visible material prosperity is its promise for the righteous, and the opposite its threatening for the godless. No doubt retribution is not wholly postponed till another life, but it does not fall so surely and visibly as this psalm would lead us to expect. The relative imperfection of the Old Testament revelation is reflected in the Psalms, faith's answer to Heaven's word. The clear light of New Testament revelation of the future is wanting, nor could the truest view of the meaning and blessedness of sorrow be adequately and proportionately held before Christ had taught it by His own history and by His words. The Cross was needed before the mystery of righteous suffering could be fully elucidated, and the psalmist's solution is but provisional. His faith that infinite love ruled and that righteousness was always gain, and sin loss, is grandly and eternally true. Nor is it to be forgotten that he lived and sang in an order of things in which the Divine government had promised material blessings as the result of spiritual faithfulness, and that, with whatever anomalies, modest prosperity did, on the whole, attend the true Israelite. The Scripture books which wrestle most profoundly with the standing puzzle of prosperous evil and afflicted goodness are late books, not merely because religious reflectiveness was slowly evolved, but because decaying faith had laid Israel open to many wounds, and the condition of things which accompanied the decline of the ancient order abounded with instances of triumphant wickedness.

But though this psalm does not go to the bottom

of its theme, its teaching of the blessedness of absolute trust in God's providence is ever fresh, and fits close to all stages of revelation; and its prophecies of triumph for the afflicted who trust and of confusion to the evil-doer need only to be referred to the end to be completely established. As a theodicy, or vindication of the ways of God with men, it was true for its age, but the New Testament goes beneath it. As an exhortation to patient trust and an exhibition of the sure blessings thereof, it remains what it has been to many generations: the gentle encourager of meek faith and the stay of afflicted hearts.

Marked progress of thought is not to be looked for in an acrostic psalm. In the present instance the same ideas are reiterated with emphatic persistence, but little addition or variation. To the didactic poet "to write the same things is not grievous," for they are his habitual thoughts; and for his scholars "it is safe," for there is no better aid to memory than the cadenced monotony of the same ideas cast into song and slightly varied. But a possible grouping may be suggested by observing that the thought of the "cutting off" of the wicked and the inheritance of the land by the righteous occurs three times. If it is taken as a kind of refrain, we may cast the psalm into four portions, the first three of which close with that double thought. Vv. 1–9 will then form a group, characterised by exhortations to trust and assurances of triumph. The second section will then be vv. 10–22, which, while reiterating the ground tone of the whole, does so with a difference, inasmuch as its main thought is the destruction of the wicked, in contrast with the triumph of the righteous in the preceding verses. A third division will be vv. 23–29, of which the chief

feature is the adduction of the psalmist's own experience as authenticating his teaching in regard to the Divine care of the righteous, and that extended to his descendants. The last section (vv. 30–40) gathers up all, reasserts the main thesis, and confirms it by again adducing the psalmist's experience in confirmation of the other half of his assurances, namely the destruction of the wicked. But the poet does not wish to close his words with that gloomy picture, and therefore this last section bends round again to reiterate and strengthen the promises for the righteous, and its last note is one of untroubled trust and joy in experienced deliverance.

The first portion (vv. 1–9) consists of a series of exhortations to trust and patience, accompanied by assurance of consequent blessing. These are preceded and followed by a dehortation from yielding to the temptation of fretting against the prosperity of evil-doers, based upon the assurance of its transitoriness. Thus the positive precepts inculcating the ideal temper to be cultivated are framed in a setting of negatives, inseparable from them. The tendency to murmur at flaunting wrong must be repressed if the disposition of trust is to be cultivated; and, on the other hand, full obedience to the negative precepts is only possible when the positive ones have been obeyed with some degree of completeness. The soul's husbandry must be busied in grubbing up weeds as well as in sowing; but the true way to take away nourishment from the baser is to throw the strength of the soil into growing the nobler crop. "Fret not thyself" (A.V.) is literally, "Heat not thyself," and "Be not envious" is "Do not glow," the root idea being that of becoming fiery red. The one word expresses the kindling emotion, the other its visible sign in the flushed face. Envy, anger, and any other

violent and God-forgetting emotion are included. There is nothing in the matter in hand worth getting into a heat about, for the prosperity in question is short-lived. This leading conviction moulds the whole psalm, and, as we have pointed out, is half of the refrain. We look for the other half to accompany it, as usual, and we find it in one rendering of ver. 3, which has fallen into discredit with modern commentators, and to which we shall come presently; but for the moment we may pause to suggest that the picture of the herbage withering as soon as cut, under the fierce heat of the Eastern sun, may stand in connection with the metaphors in ver. 1. Why should we blaze with indignation when so much hotter a glow will dry up the cut grass? Let it wave in brief glory, unmeddled with by us. The scythe and the sunshine will soon make an end. The precept and its reason are not on the highest levels of Christian ethics, but they are unfairly dealt with if taken to mean, Do not envy the wicked man's prosperity, nor wish it were yours, but solace yourself with the assurance of his speedy ruin. What is said is far nobler than that. It is, Do not let the prosperity of unworthy men shake your faith in God's government, nor fling you into an unwholesome heat, for God will sweep away the anomaly in due time.

In regard to the positive precepts, the question arises whether ver. 3 *b* is command or promise, with which is associated another question as to the translation of the words rendered by the A.V., "Verily thou shalt be fed," and by the R.V., "Follow after faithfulness." The relation of the first and second parts of the subsequent verses is in favour of regarding the clause as promise, but the force of that consideration is somewhat weakened by the non-occurrence in ver. 3 of the copula which

introduces the promises of the other verses. Still its omission does not seem sufficient to forbid taking the clause as corresponding with these. The imperative is similarly used as substantially a future in ver. 27: "and dwell for evermore." The fact that in every other place in the psalm where "dwelling in the land" is spoken of it is a promise of the sure results of trust, points to the same sense here, and the juxtaposition of the two ideas in the refrain leads us to expect to find the prediction of ver. 2 followed by its companion there. On the whole, then, to understand ver. 3 *b* as promise seems best. (So LXX., Ewald, Grätz, etc.) What, then, is the meaning of its last words? If they are a continuation of the promise, they must describe some blessed effect of trust. Two renderings present themselves, one that adopted in the R.V. margin, "Feed securely," and another "Feed on faithfulness" (*i.e.*, of God). Hupfeld calls this an "arbitrary and forced" reference of "faithfulness"; but it worthily completes the great promise. The blessed results of trust and active goodness are stable dwelling in the land and nourishment there from a faithful God. The thoughts move within the Old Testament circle, but their substance is eternally true, for they who take God for their portion have a safe abode, and feed their souls on His unalterable adherence to His promises and on the abundance flowing thence.

The subsequent precepts bear a certain relation to each other, and, taken together, make a lovely picture of the inner secret of the devout life: "Delight thyself in Jehovah; roll thy way on Him; trust in Him; be silent to Jehovah." No man will commit his way to God who does not delight in Him; and unless he has so committed his way, he cannot rest in the Lord.

The heart that delights in God, finding its truest joy in Him and being well and at ease when consciously moving in Him as an all-encompassing atmosphere and reaching towards Him with the deepest of its desires, will live far above the region of disappointment. For it desire and fruition go together. Longings fixed on Him fulfil themselves. We can have as much of God as we wish. If He is our delight, we shall wish nothing contrary to nor apart from Him, and wishes which are directed to Him cannot be in vain. To delight in God is to possess our delight, and in Him to find fulfilled wishes and abiding joys. "Commit thy way unto Him," or "Roll it upon Him" in the exercise of trust; and, as the verse says with grand generality, omitting to specify an object for the verb, "He will do"—all that is wanted, or will finish the work. To roll one's way upon Jehovah implies subordination of will and judgment to Him and quiet confidence in His guidance. If the heart delights in Him, and the will waits silent before Him, and a happy consciousness of dependence fills the soul, the desert will not be trackless, nor the travellers fail to hear the voice which says, "This is the way; walk ye in it." He who trusts is led, and God works for him, clearing away clouds and obstructions. His good may be evil spoken of, but the vindication by fact will make his righteousness shine spotless; and his cause may be apparently hopeless, but God will deliver him. He shall shine forth as the sun, not only in such earthly vindication as the psalmist prophesied, but more resplendently, as Christian faith has been gifted with long sight to anticipate, "in the kingdom of my Father." Thus delighting and trusting, a man may "be silent.' Be still before Jehovah, in the silence of a submissive

heart, and let not that stillness be torpor, but gather thyself together and stretch out thy hope towards Him. That patience is no mere passive endurance without murmuring, but implies tension of expectance. Only if it is thus occupied will it be possible to purge the heart of that foolish and weakening heat which does no harm to any one but to the man himself. "Heat not thyself; it only leads to doing evil. Thus the section returns upon itself and once more ends with the unhesitating assurance, based upon the very essence of God's covenant with the nation, that righteousness is the condition of inheritance, and sin the cause of certain destruction. The narrower application of the principle, which was all that the then stage of revelation made clear to the psalmist, melts away for us into the Christian certainty that righteousness is the condition of dwelling in the true land of promise, and that sin is always death, in germ or in full fruitage.

The refrain occurs next in ver. 22, and the portion thus marked off (vv. 10–22) may be dealt with as a smaller whole. After a repetition (vv. 10, 11) of the main thesis slightly expanded, it sketches in vivid outline the fury of "the wicked" against "the just" and the grim retribution that turns their weapons into agents of their destruction. How dramatically are contrasted the two pictures of the quiet righteous in the former section and of this raging enemy, with his gnashing teeth and arsenal of murder! And with what crushing force the thought of the awful laughter of Jehovah, in foresight of the swift flight towards the blind miscreant of the day of his fall, which has already, as it were, set out on its road, smites his elaborate preparations into dust! Silently the good man sits wrapped in

his faith. Without are raging, armed foes. Above, the laughter of God rolls thunderous, and from the throne the obedient "day" is winging its flight, like an eagle with lightning bolts in its claws. What can the end be but another instance of the solemn lex talionis, by which a man's evil slays himself?

Various forms of the contrast between the two classes follow, with considerable repetition and windings. One consideration which has to be taken into account in estimating the distribution of material prosperity is strongly put in vv. 16, 17. The good of outward blessings depends chiefly on the character of their owner. The strength of the extract from a raw material depends on the solvent applied, and there is none so powerful to draw out the last drop of most poignant and pure sweetness from earthly good as is righteousness of heart. Naboth's vineyard will yield better wine, if Naboth is trusting in Jehovah, than all the vines of Jezreel or Samaria. "Many wicked" have not as much of the potentiality of blessedness in all their bursting coffers as a poor widow may distil out of two mites. The reasons for that are manifold, but the prevailing thought of the psalm leads to one only being named here. "For," says ver. 17, "the arms of the wicked shall be broken." Little is the good of possessions which cannot defend their owners from the stroke of God's executioners, but themselves pass away. The poor man's little is much, because, among other reasons, he is upheld by God, and therefore needs not to cherish anxiety, which embitters the enjoyments of others. Again the familiar thought of permanent inheritance recurs, but now with a glance at the picture just drawn of the destruction coming to the wicked. There are days and days. God

saw that day of ruin speeding on its errand, and He has loving sympathetic knowledge of the days of the righteous (i. 6), and holds their lives in His hand; therefore continuance and abundance are ensured.

The antithetical structure of vv. 16–22 is skilfully varied, so as to avoid monotony. It is elastic within limits. We note that in the Teth strophe (vv. 16, 17) each verse contains a complete contrast, while in the Yod strophe (vv. 18, 19) one half only of the contrast is presented, which would require a similar expansion of the other over two verses. Instead of this, however, the latter half is compressed into one verse (20), which is elongated by a clause. Then in the Lamed strophe (vv. 21, 22) the briefer form recurs, as in vv. 16, 17. Thus the longer antithesis is enclosed between two parallel shorter ones, and a certain variety breaks up the sameness of the swing from one side to the other, and suggests a pause in the flow of the psalm. The elongated verse (20) reiterates the initial metaphor of withering herbage (ver. 2) with an addition, for the rendering "fat of lambs" must be given up as incongruous, and only plausible on account of the emblem of smoke in the next clause. But the two metaphors are independent. Just as in ver. 2, so here, the gay "beauty of the pastures," so soon to wilt and be changed into brown barrenness, mirrors the fate of the wicked. Ver. 2 shows the grass fallen before the scythe; ver. 20 lets us see it in its flush of loveliness, so tragically unlike what it will be when its "day" has come. The other figure of smoke is a stereotype in all tongues for evanescence. The thick wreaths thin away and melt. Another peculiar form of the standing antithesis appears in the Lamed strophe (vv. 21, 22), which sets forth the gradual impoverishment of the wicked and prosperity

as well as beneficence of the righteous, and, by the "for" of ver. 22, traces these up to the "curse and blessing of God, which become manifest in the final destiny of the two" (Delitzsch). Not dishonesty, but bankruptcy, is the cause of "not paying again"; while, on the other hand, the blessing of God not only enriches, but softens, making the heart which has received grace a well-spring of grace to needy ones, even if they are foes. The form of the contrast suggests its dependence on the promises in Deut. xii. 44, xv. 6, 28. Thus the refrain is once more reached, and a new departure taken.

The third section is shorter than the preceding (vv. 23–29), and has, as its centre, the psalmist's confirmation from his own experience of the former part of his antithesis, the fourth section similarly confirming the second. All this third part is sunny with the Divine favour streaming upon the righteous, the only reference to the wicked being in the refrain at the close. The first strophe (vv. 23, 24) declares God's care for the former under the familiar image of guidance and support to a traveller. As in vv. 5, 7, the "way" is an emblem of active life, and is designated as "his" who treads it. The intention of the psalm, the context of the metaphor, and the parallelism with the verses just referred to, settle the reference of the ambiguous pronouns "he" and "his" in ver. 23 *b*. God delights in the good man's way (i. 6), and that is the reason for His establishing his goings. "Quoniam Deo grata est piorum via, gressus ipsum ad lætum finem adducit" (Calvin). That promise is not to be limited to either the material or moral region. The ground tone of the psalm is that the two regions coincide in so far as prosperity in the outer is the infallible index of rightness in the inner.

The dial has two sets of hands, one within and one without, but both are, as it were, mounted on the same spindle, and move accurately alike. Steadfast treading in the path of duty and successful undertakings are both included, since they are inseparable in fact. True, even the fixed faith of the psalmist has to admit that the good man's path is not always smooth. If facts had not often contradicted his creed, he would never have sung his song; and hence he takes into account the case of such a man's falling, and seeks to reduce its importance by the considerations of its recoverableness and of God's keeping hold of the man's hand all the while.

The Nun strophe brings in the psalmist's experience to confirm his doctrine. The studiously impersonal tone of the psalm is dropped only here and in the complementary reference to the fall of the wicked (vv. 35, 36). Observation and reflection yield the same results. Experience seals the declarations of faith. His old eyes have seen much; and the net result is that the righteous may be troubled, but not abandoned, and that there is an entail of blessing to their children. In general, experience preaches the same truths to-day, for, on the whole, wrong-doing lies at the root of most of the hopeless poverty and misery of modern society. Idleness, recklessness, thriftlessness, lust, drunkenness, are the potent factors of it; and if their handiwork and that of the subtler forms of respectable godlessness and evil were to be eliminated, the sum of human wretchedness would shrink to very small dimensions. The mystery of suffering is made more mysterious by ignoring its patent connection with sin, and by denying the name of sin to many of its causes. If men's conduct were judged by God's

standard, there would be less wonder at God's judgments manifested in men's suffering.

The solidarity of the family was more strongly felt in ancient times than in our days of individualism, but even now the children of the righteous, if they maintain the hereditary character, do largely realise the blessing which the psalmist declares is uniformly theirs. He is not to be tied down to literality in his statement of the general working of things. What he deals with is the prevailing trend, and isolated exceptions do not destroy his assertion. Of course continuance in paternal virtues is presupposed as the condition of succeeding to paternal good. In the strength of the adduced experience, a hortatory tone, dropped since ver. 8, is resumed, with reminiscences of that earlier series of counsels. The secret of permanence is condensed into two antithetical precepts, to depart from evil and do good, and the key-note is sounded once more in a promise, cast into the guise of a commandment (compare ver. 3), of unmoved habitation, which is, however, not to be stretched to refer to a future life, of which the psalm says nothing. Such permanent abiding is sure, inasmuch as Jehovah loves judgment and watches over the objects of His loving-kindness.

The acrostic sequence fails at this point, if the Masoretic text is adhered to. There is evident disorder in the division of verses, for ver. 28 has four clauses instead of the normal two. If the superfluous two are detached from it and connected as one strophe with ver. 29, a regular two-versed and four-claused strophe results. Its first word (L'olam="for ever") has the Ayin, due in the alphabetical sequence, in its second letter, the first being a prefixed preposition, which may be passed over, as in ver. 39 the copula Vav is pre-

fixed to the initial letter. Delitzsch takes this to be the required letter; but if so, another irregularity remains, inasmuch as the first couplet of the strophe should be occupied with the fate of the wicked, as antithetical to that of the righteous in ver. 29. "They are preserved for ever" throws the whole strophe out of order. Probably, therefore, there is textual corruption here, which the LXX. helps in correcting. It has an evidently double rendering of the clause, as is not unfrequently the case where there is ambiguity or textual difficulty, and gives side by side with "They shall be preserved for ever" the rendering "The lawless shall be hunted out," which can be re-turned into Hebrew so as to give the needed initial Ayin either in a somewhat rare word, or in one which occurs in ver. 35. If this correction is adopted, the anomalies disappear, and strophe, division, acrostic, and antithetical refrain are all in order.

The last section (ver. 30 to end), like the preceding, has the psalmist's experience for its centre, and traces the entail of conduct to a second generation of evil-doers, as the former did to the seed of the righteous. Both sections begin with the promise of firmness for the "goings or steps" of the righteous, but the later verses expand the thought by a fuller description of the moral conditions of stability. "The law of his God is in his heart." That is the foundation on which all permanence is built. From that as centre there issue wise and just words on the one hand and stable deeds on the other. That is true in the psalmist's view in reference to outward success and continuance, but still more profoundly in regard to steadfast progress in paths of righteousness. He who orders his footsteps by God's known will is saved from much hesitancy, vacillation,

and stumbling, and plants a firm foot even on slippery places.

Once more the picture of the enmity of the wicked recurs, as in vv. 12–14, with the difference that there the emphasis was laid on the destruction of the plotters, and here it is put on the vindication of the righteous by acts of deliverance (vv. 32, 33).

In ver. 34 another irregularity occurs, in its being the only verse in a strophe and being prolonged to three clauses. This may be intended to give emphasis to the exhortation contained in it, which, like that in ver. 27, is the only one in its section. The two key words "inherit" and "cut off" are brought together. Not only are the two fates set in contrast, but the waiters on Jehovah are promised the sight of the destruction of the wicked. Satisfaction at the sight is implied. There is nothing unworthy in solemn thankfulness when God's judgments break the teeth of some devouring lion. Divine judgments minister occasion for praise even from pure spirits before the throne, and men relieved from the incubus of godless oppression may well draw a long breath of relief, which passes into celebration of His righteous acts. No doubt there is a higher tone, which remembers ruth and pity even in that solemn joy; but Christian feeling does not destroy but modify the psalmist's thankfulness for the sweeping away of godless antagonism to goodness.

His assurance to those who wait on Jehovah has his own experience as its guarantee (ver. 35), just as the complementary assurance in ver. 24 had in ver. 25. The earlier metaphors of the green herbage and the beauty of the pastures are heightened now. A venerable, wide-spreading giant of the forests, rooted in its native soil, is grander than those humble growths; but for lofty

cedars or lowly grass the end is the same. Twice the psalmist stood at the same place; once the great tree laid its large limbs across the field, and lifted a firm bole: again he came, and a clear space revealed how great had been the bulk which shadowed it. Not even a stump was left to tell where the leafy glory had been.

Vv. 37, 38, make the Shin strophe, and simply reiterate the antithesis which has moulded the whole psalm, with the addition of that reference to a second generation which appeared in the third and fourth parts. The word rendered in the A.V. and R.V. "latter end" here means posterity. The "perfect man" is further designated as a "man of peace."

The psalm might have ended with this gathering together of its contents in one final emphatic statement, but the poet will not leave the stern words of destruction as his last. Therefore he adds a sweet, long-drawn-out close, like the calm, extended clouds, that lie motionless in the western sky after a day of storm, in which he once more sings of the blessedness of those who wait on Jehovah. Trouble will come, notwithstanding his assurances that righteousness is blessedness; but in it Jehovah will be a fortress home, and out of it He will save them. However the teaching of the psalm may need modification in order to coincide with the highest New Testament doctrine of the relation between righteousness and prosperity, these confidences need none. For ever and absolutely they are true: in trouble a stronghold, out of trouble a Saviour, is God to all who cling to Him. Very beautifully the closing verse lingers on its theme, and wreathes its thoughts together, with repetition that tells how sweet they are to the singer: "Jehovah helps them, and *rescues* them; He *rescues* them, . . . and saves them." So the measure

of the strophe is complete, but the song flows over in an additional clause, which points the path for all who seek such blessedness. Trust is peace. They who take refuge in Jehovah are safe, and their inheritance shall be for ever. That is the psalmist's inmost secret of a blessed life.

PSALM XXXVIII.

1 Jehovah, not in Thine indignation do Thou rebuke me,
Nor in Thy hot anger chastise me.
2 For Thine arrows are come down into me,
And down upon me comes Thy hand.

3 There is no soundness in my flesh because of Thy wrath;
There is no health in my bones because of my sin.
4 For my iniquities have gone over my head;
As a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me.

5 My bruises smell foully, they run with matter,
Because of my folly.
6 I am twisted [with pain]; I am bowed down utterly;
All the day I drag about in squalid attire.

7 For my loins are full of burning,
And there is no soundness in my flesh.
8 I am exhausted and crushed utterly;
I roar for the sighing of my heart.

9 Lord, present to Thee is all my desire,
And my sighing is not hid from Thee.
10 My heart flutters, my strength has left me,
And the light of my eyes—even it is no more with me.

11 My lovers and friends stand aloof from my stroke,
And my near [kin] stand far off.
12 And they who seek after my life set snares [for me],
And they who desire my hurt speak destruction,
And meditate deceits all the day.

13 And I, like a deaf man, do not hear,
And am like one dumb, who opens not his mouth.
14 Yea, I am become like a man who hears not,
And in whose mouth are no counter-pleas.

15 For for Thee, Jehovah, do I wait;
Thou, Thou wilt answer, O Lord, my God.

16 For I said, Lest they should rejoice over me,
[And] when my foot slips, should magnify themselves over me.
17 For I am ready to fall,
And my sorrow is continually present to me.
18 For I must declare my guilt,
Be distressed for my sin.
19 And my enemies are lively, they are strong,
(And my enemies without cause are strong?)
And they who wrongfully hate me are many;
20 And, requiting evil for good,
They are my adversaries because I follow good.
21 Forsake me not, Jehovah;
My God, be not far from me.
22 Haste to my help,
O God, my salvation.

THIS is a long-drawn wail, passionate at first, but gradually calming itself into submission and trust, though never passing from the minor key. The name of God is invoked thrice (vv. 1, 9, 15), and each time that the psalmist looks up his burden is somewhat easier to carry, and some "low beginnings of content" steal into his heart and mingle with his lament. Sorrow finds relief in repeating its plaint. It is the mistake of cold-blooded readers to look for consecution of thought in the cries of a wounded soul; but it is also a mistake to be blind to the gradual sinking of the waves in this psalm, which begins with deprecating God's wrath, and ends with quietly nestling close to Him as "my salvation."

The characteristic of the first burst of feeling is its unbroken gloom. It sounds the depths of darkness, with which easy-going, superficial lives are unfamiliar, but whoever has been down into them will not think the picture overcharged with black. The occasion of the psalmist's deep dejection cannot be gathered from his words. He, like all poets who teach in song what

they learn in suffering, translates his personal sorrows into language fitting for others' pains. The feelings are more important to him and to us than the facts, and we must be content to leave unsettled the question of his circumstances, on which, after all, little depends. Only, it is hard for the present writer, at least, to believe that such a psalm, quivering, as it seems, with agony, is not the genuine cry of a brother's tortured soul, but an utterance invented for a personified nation. The close verbal resemblance of the introductory deprecation of chastisement in anger to Psalm vi. 1 has been supposed to point to a common authorship, and Delitzsch takes both psalms, along with Psalms xxxii., and li. as a series belonging to the time of David's penitence after his great fall from purity. But the resemblance in question would rather favour the supposition of difference of authorship, since quotation is more probable than self-repetition. Jer. x. 23 is by some held to be the original, and either Jeremiah himself or some later singer to have been the author of the psalm. The question of which of two similar passages is source and which is copy is always ticklish. Jeremiah's bent was assimilative, and his prophecies are full of echoes. The priority, therefore, probably lies with one or other of the psalmists, if there are two.

The first part of the psalm is entirely occupied with the subjective aspect of the psalmist's affliction. Three elements are conspicuous: God's judgments, the singer's consciousness of sin, and his mental and probably physical sufferings. Are the "arrows" and crushing weight of God's "hand," which he deprecates in the first verses, the same as the sickness and wounds, whether of mind or body, which he next describes so pathetically? They are generally taken to be so, but

the language of this section and the contents of the remainder of the psalm rather point to a distinction between them. It would seem that there are three stages, not two, as that interpretation would make them. Unspecified calamities, recognised by the sufferer as God's chastisements, have roused his conscience, and its gnawing has superinduced mental and bodily pain. The terribly realistic description of the latter may, indeed, be figurative, but is more probably literal. The reiterated synonyms for God's displeasure in vv. 1, 3, show how all the aspects of that solemn thought are familiar. The first word regards it as an outburst, or explosion, like a charge of dynamite ; the second as "glowing, igniting"; the third as effervescent, bubbling like lava in a crater. The metaphors for the effects of this anger in ver. 2 deepen the impression of its terribleness. It is a fearful fate to be the target for God's "arrows," but it is worse to be crushed under the weight of His "hand." The two forms of representation refer to the same facts, but make a climax. The verbs in ver. 2 are from one root, meaning to come down, or to lie upon. In 2 *a* the word is reflexive, and represents the "arrows" as endowed with volition, hurling themselves down. They penetrate with force proportionate to the distance which they fall, as a meteoric stone buries itself in the ground. Such being the wounding, crushing power of the Divine "anger," its effects on the psalmist are spread out before God, in the remaining part of this first division, with plaintive reiteration. The connection which a quickened conscience discerns between sorrow and sin is strikingly set forth in ver. 3, in which "thine indignation" and "my sin" are the double fountain-heads of bitterness. The quivering frame first felt the power of God's anger, and then the awakened

conscience turned inwards and discerned the occasion of the anger. The three elements which we have distinguished are clearly separated here, and their connection laid bare.

The second of these is the sense of sin, which the psalmist feels as taking all "peace" or well-being out of his "bones," as a flood rolling its black waters over his head, as a weight beneath which he cannot stand upright, and again as foolishness, since its only effect has been, to bring to him not what he hoped to win by it, but this miserable plight.

Then, he pours himself out, with the monotonous repetition so natural to self-pity, in a graphic accumulation of pictures of disease, which may be taken as symbolic of mental distress, but are better understood literally. With the whole, Isa. i. 5, 6, should be compared, nor should the partial resemblances of Isa. liii. be overlooked. No fastidiousness keeps the psalmist from describing offensive details. His body is scourged and livid with parti-coloured, swollen weals from the lash, and these discharge foul-smelling matter. With this compare Isa. liii. 5, "His stripes" (same word). Whatever may be thought of the other physical features of suffering, this must obviously be figurative. Contorted in pain, bent down by weakness, dragging himself wearily with the slow gait of an invalid, squalid in attire, burning with inward fever, diseased in every tortured atom of flesh, he is utterly worn out and broken (same word as "bruised," Isa. liii. 5). Inward misery, the cry of the heart, must have outward expression, and, with Eastern vehemence in utterance of emotions which Western reticence prefers to let gnaw in silence at the roots of life, he "roars" aloud because his heart groans.

This vivid picture of the effects of the sense of personal sin will seem to superficial modern Christianity, exaggerated and alien from experience; but the deeper a man's godliness, the more will he listen with sympathy, with understanding and with appropriation of such piercing laments as his own. Just as few of us are dowered with sensibilities so keen as to feel what poets feel, in love or hope, or delight in nature, or with power to express the feelings, and yet can recognise in their winged words the heightened expression of our own less full emotions, so the truly devout soul will find, in the most passionate of these wailing notes, the completer expression of his own experience. We must go down into the depths and cry to God out of them, if we are to reach sunny heights of communion. Intense consciousness of sin is the obverse of ardent aspiration after righteousness, and that is but a poor type of religion which has not both. It is one of the glories of the Psalter that both are given utterance to in it in words which are as vital to-day as when they first came warm from the lips of these long dead men. Everything in the world has changed, but these songs of penitence and plaintive deprecation, like their twin bursts of rapturous communion, were "not born for death." Contrast the utter deadness of the religious hymns of all other nations with the fresh vitality of the Psalms. As long as hearts are penetrated with the consciousness of evil done and loved, these strains will fit themselves to men's lips.

Because the psalmist's recounting of his pains was prayer and not soliloquy or mere cry of anguish, it calms him. We make the wound deeper by turning round the arrow in it, when we dwell upon suffering without thinking of God; but when, like the psalmist,

we tell all to Him, healing begins. Thus, the second part (vv. 9–14) is perceptibly calmer, and though still agitated, its thought of God is more trustful, and silent submission at the close takes the place of the "roaring," the shrill cry of agony which ended the first part. A further variation of tone is that, instead of the entirely subjective description of the psalmist's sufferings in vv. 1–8, the desertion by friends and the hostility of foes, are now the main elements of trial. There is comparative peace for a tortured heart in the thought that all its desire and sighing are known to God. That knowledge is prior to the heart's prayer, but does not make it needless, for by the prayer the conviction of the Divine knowledge has entered the troubled soul, and brought some prelude of deliverance and hope of answer. The devout soul does not argue "Thou knowest, and I need not speak," but "Thou knowest, therefore I tell Thee"; and it is soothed in and after telling. He who begins his prayer, by submitting to chastisement and only deprecating the form of it inflicted by "wrath," will pass to the more gracious thought of God as lovingly cognisant of both his desire and his sighing, his wishes and his pains. The burst of the storm is past, when that light begins to break through clouds, though waves still run high.

How high they still run is plain from the immediate recurrence of the strain of recounting the singer's sorrows. This recrudescence of woe after the clear calm of a moment is only too well known to us all in our sorrows. The psalmist returns to speak of his sickness in ver. 10, which is really a picture of syncope or fainting. The heart's action is described by a rare word, which in its root means to go round and round, and is here in an intensive form expressive of violent

motion, or possibly is to be regarded as a diminutive rather than an intensive, expressive of the thinner though quicker pulse. Then come collapse of strength and failure of sight. But this echo of the preceding part immediately gives place to the new element in the psalmist's sorrow, arising from the behaviour of friends and foes. The frequent complaint of desertion by friends has to be repeated by most sufferers in this selfish world. They keep far away from his "stroke," says the psalm, using the same word as is employed for leprosy, and as is used in the verb in Isa. liii. 4 ("stricken"). There is a tone of wonder and disappointment in the untranslatable play of language in ver. 11 *b*. "My near relations stand far off." Kin are not always kind. Friends have deserted because foes have beset him. Probably we have here the facts which in the previous part are conceived of as the "arrows" of God.

Open and secret enemies laying snares for him, as for some hunted wild creature, eagerly seeking his life, speaking "destructions" as if they would fain kill him with their words, and perpetually whispering lies about him, were recognised by him as instruments of God's judgment, and evoked his consciousness of sin, which again led to actual disease. But the bitter schooling led to something else more blessed—namely, to silent resignation. Like David, when he let Shimei shriek his curses at him from the hillside and answered not, the psalmist is deaf and dumb to malicious tongues. He will speak to God, but to man he is silent, in utter submission of will.

Isaiah liii. 7 gives the same trait in the perfect Sufferer, a faint foreshadowing of whom is seen in the psalmist; and 1 Peter ii. 23 bids all who would follow

the Lamb whithersoever He goeth, like Him open not their mouths when reviled, but commit themselves to the righteous Judge.

Once more the psalmist lifts his eyes to God, and the third invocation of the Name is attended by an increase of confidence. In the first part, "Jehovah" was addressed; in the second the designation "Lord" was used; in the third, both are united and the appropriating name "my God" is added. In the closing invocation (vv. 22–3) all three reappear, and each is the plea of a petition. The characteristics of these closing verses are three: humble trust, the marshalling of its reasons, and the combination of acknowledgment of sin and professions of innocence. The growth of trust is very marked, if the first part, with its synonyms for God's wrath and its deprecation of unmeasured chastisement and its details of pain, be compared with the quiet hope and assurance that God will answer, and with that great name "my Salvation." The singer does not indeed touch the heights of triumphant faith; but he who can grasp God as his, and can be silent because he is sure that God will speak by delivering deeds for him and can call Him his Salvation, has climbed far enough to have the sunshine all round him, and to be clear of the mists among which his song began. The best reason for letting the enemy speak on unanswered is the confidence that a mightier voice will speak. "But thou wilt answer, Lord, for me" may well make us deaf and dumb to temptations and threats, calumnies and flatteries.

How does this confidence spring in so troubled a heart? The fourfold "For" beginning each verse from 15 to 18 weaves them all into a chain. The first gives the reason for the submissive silence as being quiet con-

fidence; and the succeeding three may be taken as either dependent on each other, or, as is perhaps better, as co-ordinate and all-assigning reasons for that confidence. Either construction yields worthy and natural meanings. If the former be adopted, trust in God's undertaking of the silent sufferer's cause is based upon the prayer which broke his silence. Dumb to men, he had breathed to God his petition for help, and had buttressed it with this plea "Lest they rejoice over me," and he had feared that they would, because he knew that he was ready to fall and had ever before him his pain, and that because he felt himself forced to lament and confess his sin. But it seems to yield a richer meaning, if the "For's" be regarded as co-ordinate. They then become a striking and instructive example of faith's logic, the ingenuity of pleading which finds encouragements in discouragements. The suppliant is sure of answer because he has told God his fear, and yet again because he is so near falling and therefore needs help so much, and yet again because he has made a clean breast of his sin. Trust in God's help, distrust of self, consciousness of weakness, and penitence make anything possible rather than that the prayer which embodies them should be flung up to an unanswering God. They are prevalent pleas with Him in regard to which He will not be "as a man that heareth not, and in whose mouth there is no reply." They are grounds of assurance to him who prays.

The juxtaposition of consciousness of sin in ver. 18 with the declaration that love of good was the cause of being persecuted, brings out the twofold attitude, in regard to God and men, which a devout soul may permissibly and sometimes must necessarily assume. There may be the truest sense of sinfulness, along with a

clear-hearted affirmation of innocence in regard to men, and a conviction that it is good and goodwill to them, not evil in the sufferer, which makes him the butt of hatred. Not less instructive is the double view of the same facts presented in the beginning and end of this psalm. They were to the psalmist first regarded as God's chastisement in wrath, His "arrows" and heavy "hand," because of sin. Now they are men's enmity, because of his love of good. Is there not an entire contradiction between these two views of suffering, its cause and source? Certainly not, but rather the two views differ only in the angle of vision, and may be combined, like stereoscopic pictures, into one rounded, harmonious whole. To be able so to combine them is one of the rewards of such pleading trust as breathes its plaintive music through this psalm, and wakes responsive notes in devout hearts still.

THE PSALMS

BY

ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D.D.

VOLUME II.

PSALMS XXXIX.—LXXXIX.

NEW YORK
A. C. ARMSTRONG AND SON
3 and 5 West Eighteenth Street
London: Hodder and Stoughton
1908

CONTENTS

		PAGE
PSALM	XXXIX.	1
,,	XL.	14
,,	XLI.	30
,,	XLII., XLIII.	41
,,	XLIV.	54
,,	XLV.	63
,,	XLVI.	79
,,	XLVII.	86
,,	XLVIII.	92
,,	XLIX.	100
,,	L.	115
,,	LI.	125
,,	LII.	142
,,	LIII.	148
,,	LIV.	151

PAGE

PSALM LV. 158
" LVI. 171
" LVII. 180
" LVIII. 189
" LIX. 198
" LX. 209
" LXI. 216
" LXII. 223
" LXIII. 232
" LXIV. 241
" LXV. 246
" LXVI. 255
" LXVII. 264
" LXVIII. 269
" LXIX. 293
" LXX. 306
" LXXI. 308
" LXXII. 315
" LXXIII. 333
" LXXIV. 348

PAGE

PSALM LXXV. 359

" LXXVI. 366

" LXXVII. 371

" LXXVIII. 382

" LXXIX. 396

" LXXX. 404

" LXXXI. 414

" LXXXII. 425

" LXXXIII. 431

" LXXXIV. 440

" LXXXV. 451

" LXXXVI. 461

" LXXXVII. 470

" LXXXVIII. 477

" LXXXIX. 487

PSALM XXXIX.

1 I said, I will guard my ways, that I sin not with my tongue;
I will put a muzzle on my mouth
So long as the wicked is before me.
2 I made myself dumb in still submission,
I kept silence joylessly,
And my s rrow was stirred.
3 My heart was hot within me;
While I mused the fire blazed up;
I spake with my tongue.

4 Make me, Jehovah, to know my end,
And the measure of my days, what it is;
Let me know how fleeting I am.
5 Behold, as handbreadths hast Thou made my days,
And my lifetime is as nothing before Thee;
Surely nothing but a breath is every man, stand he ever so firm.
Selah.
6 Surely every man goes about like a shadow;
Surely for a breath do they make [such a stir];
He heaps up [goods] and knows not who will gather them.

7 And now what wait I for, Lord?
My hope—to Thee it goes.
8 From all my transgressions deliver me;
Make me not a reproach of the fool.
9 I make myself dumb, I open not my mouth,
For Thou hast done [it].

10 Remove Thy stroke from me;
I am wasted by the assault of Thy hand.
11 When with rebukes for iniquity Thou correctest a man,
Like a moth Thou frayest away his gracefulness;
Surely every man is [but] a breath. Selah.

12 Hear my prayer, Jehovah, and give ear to my cry;
At my weeping be not silent:
For I am a guest with Thee,
And a sojourner like all my fathers.
13 Look away from me, that I may brighten up,
Before I go hence and be no more.

PROTRACTED suffering, recognised as chastisement for sin, had wasted the psalmist's strength. It had been borne for a while in silence, but the rush of emotion had burst the floodgates. The psalm does not repeat the words which forced themselves from the hot heart, but preserves for us the calmer flow which followed. It falls into four parts, the first three of which contain three verses each, and the fourth is expanded into four, divided into two couples.

In the first part (vv. 1-3) the frustrated resolve of silence is recorded. Its motive was fear of sinning in speech "while the wicked is before me." That phrase is often explained as meaning that the sight of the prosperity of the godless in contrast with his own sorrows tempted the singer to break out into arraigning God's providence, and that he schooled himself to look at their insolent ease unmurmuringly. But the psalm has no other references to other men's flourishing condition; and it is more in accordance with its tone to suppose that his own pains, and not their pleasures, prompted to the withheld words. The presence of "the wicked" imposed on his devout heart silence as a duty. We do not complain of a friend's conduct in the hearing of his enemies. God's servants have to watch their speech about Him when godless ears are listening, lest hasty words should give occasion for malicious glee or blasphemy. So, for God's honour, the psalmist put restraint on himself. The word rendered "bridle" in ver. 2 by the A.V. and R.V. is

better taken as muzzle, for a muzzle closes the lips, and a bridle does not. The resolution thus energetically expressed was vigorously carried out: "I made myself dumb in still submission; I kept silence." And what came of it? "My sorrow was stirred." Grief suppressed is increased, as all the world knows. The closing words of ver. 2 *b* (lit. *apart from good*) are obscure, and very variously understood, some regarding them as an elliptical form of "from good and bad," and expressing completeness of silence; others taking "the good" to mean "the law, or the praise of God, or good-fortune, or such words as would serve to protect the singer from slanders." "But the preposition here employed, when it follows a verb meaning silence, does not introduce that concerning which silence is kept, but a negative result of silence" (Hupfeld). The meaning, then, is best given by some such paraphrase as "joylessly" or "and I had no comfort" (R.V.). The hidden sorrow gnawed beneath the cloak like a fire in a hollow tree; it burned fiercely unseen, and ate its way at last into sight. Locked lips make hearts hotter. Repression of utterance only feeds the fire, and sooner or later the "muzzle" is torn off, and pent-up feeling breaks into speech, often the wilder for the violence done to nature by the attempt to deny it its way. The psalmist's motive was right, and in a measure his silence was so; but his resolve did not at first go deep enough. It is the heart, not the mouth, that has to be silenced. To build a dam across a torrent without diminishing the sources that supply its waters only increases weight and pressure, and ensures a muddy flood when it bursts.

Does the psalm proceed to recount what its author said when he broke silence? It may appear so at

first sight. On the other hand, the calm prayer which follows, beginning with ver. 4, is not of the character of the wild and whirling words which were suppressed for fear of sinning, nor does the fierce fire of which the psalm has been speaking flame in it. It seems, therefore, more probable that those first utterances, in which the overcharged heart relieved itself, and which were tinged with complaint and impatience, are not preserved, and did not deserve to be, and that the pathetic, meditative petitions of the rest of the psalm succeeded them, as after the first rush of the restrained torrent comes a stiller flow. Such a prayer might well have been offered "while the wicked is before me," and might have been laid to heart by them. Its thoughts are as a cool hand laid on the singer's hot heart. They damp the fire burning in him. There is no surer remedy for inordinate sensibility to outward sorrows than fixed convictions of life's brevity and illusoriness; and these are the two thoughts which the prayer casts into sweet, sad music.

It deals with commonplaces of thought, which poets and moralists have been singing and preaching since the world began, in different tones and with discordant applications, sometimes with fierce revolt against the inevitable, sometimes with paralysing consciousness of it, sometimes using these truths as arguments for base pleasures and aims, sometimes toying with them as occasions for cheap sentiment and artificial pathos, sometimes urging them as motives for strenuous toil. But of all the voices which have ever sung or prophesied of life's short span and shadowy activities, none is nobler, saner, healthier, and calmer than this psalmist's. The stately words in which he proclaimed the transiency of all earthly things are not transient. They are

"nothing but a breath," but they have outlasted much that seemed solid, and their music will sound as long as man is on his march through time. Our "days" have a "measure"; they are a limited period, and the Measurer is God. But this fleeting creature man has an obstinate fancy of his permanence, which is not all bad indeed—since without it there would be little continuity of purpose or concentration of effort—but may easily run to extremes and hide the fact that there is an end. Therefore the prayer for Divine illumination is needed, that we may not be ignorant of that which we know well enough, if we would bethink ourselves. The solemn convictions of ver. 5 are won by the petitions of ver. 4. He who asks God to make him know his end has already gone far towards knowing it. If he seeks to estimate the "measure" of his days, he will soon come to the clear conviction that it is only the narrow space that may be covered by one or two breadths of a hand. So do noisy years shrink when heaven's chronology is applied to them. A lifetime looks long, but set against God's eternal years, it shrivels to an all but imperceptible point, having position, but not magnitude.

The thought of brevity naturally draws after it that of illusoriness. Just because life is so frail does it assume the appearance of being futile. Both ideas are blended in the metaphors of "a breath" and "a shadow." There is a solemn earnestness in the threefold "surely," confirming each clause of the seer's insight into earth's hollowness. How emphatically he puts it in the almost pleonastic language, "Surely nothing but a breath is every man, stand he ever so firm." The truth proclaimed is undeniably certain. It covers the whole ground of earthly life, and it

includes the most prosperous and firmly established. "A breath" is the very emblem of transiency and of unsubstantiality. Every solid body can be melted and made gaseous vapour, if heat enough is applied. They who habitually bring human life "before Thee" dissolve into vapour the solid-seeming illusions which cheat others, and save their own lives from being but a breath by clearly recognising that they are.

The Selah at the end of ver. 4 does not here seem to mark a logical pause in thought nor to coincide with the strophe division, but emphasises by some long-drawn, sad notes the teaching of the words. The thought runs on unbroken, and ver. 6 is closely linked to ver. 5 by the repeated "surely" and "breath" as well as in subject. The figure changes from breath to "shadow," literally "image," meaning not a sculptured likeness, but an *eidolon*, or unsubstantial apparition.

> "The glories of our birth and state
> Are shadows, not substantial things";

and all the movements of men coming and going in the world are but like a dance of shadows. As they are a breath, so are their aims. All their hubbub and activity is but like the bustle of ants on their hill—immense energy and toil, and nothing coming of it all. If any doubt remained as to the correctness of this judgment of the aimlessness of man's toil, one fact would confirm the psalmist's sentence, viz., that the most successful man labours to amass, and has to leave his piles for another whom he does not know, to gather into his storehouses and to scatter by his prodigality. There may be an allusion in the words to harvesting work. The sheaves are piled up, but in whose barn are they to be housed? Surely, if the grower and

reaper is not the ultimate owner, his toil has been for a breath.

All this is no fantastic pessimism. Still less is it an account of what life must be. If any man's is nothing but toiling for a breath, and if he himself is nothing but a breath, it is his own fault. They who are joined to God have "in their embers something that doth live"; and if they labour for Him, they do *not* labour for vanity, nor do they leave their possessions when they die. The psalmist has no reference to a future life, but the immediately following strophe shows that, though he knew that his days were few, he knew, too, that, if his hope were set on God he was freed from the curse of illusoriness and grasped no shadow, but the Living Substance, who would make his life blessedly real and pour into it substantial good.

The effect of such convictions of life's brevity and emptiness should be to throw the heart back on God. In the third part of the psalm (vv. 7–9) a higher strain sounds. The singer turns from his dreary thoughts, which might so easily become bitter ones, to lay hold on God. What should earth's vanity teach but God's sufficiency? It does not need the light of a future life to be flashed upon this mean, swiftly vanishing present in order to see it "apparelled in celestial light." Without that transforming conception, it is still possible to make it great and real by bringing it into conscious connection with God; and if hope and effort are set on Him amid all the smallnesses and perishablenesses of the outer world, hope will not chase a shadow, nor effort toil for very vanity. The psalmist sought to calm his hot heart by the contemplation of his end, but that is a poor remedy for perturbation and grief unless it leads to actual contact with the one enduring Substance.

It did so with him, and therefore "grief grew calm," just because "hope was" not "dead." To preach the vanity of all earthly things to heavy hearts is but pouring vinegar on nitre, unless it is accompanied with the great antidote to all sad and depreciating views of life: the thought that in it men may reach their hands beyond the time-film that enmeshes them and grasp the unchanging God. This psalm has no reference to life beyond the grave; but it finds in present communion by waiting and hope, emancipation from the curse of fleeting triviality which haunts every life separated from Him, like that which the Christian hope of immortality gives. God is the significant figure which gives value to the row of ciphers of which every life is without Him made up. Blessed are they who are driven by earth's vanity and drawn by God's fulness of love and power to fling themselves into His arms and nestle there! The strong recoil of the devout soul from a world which it has profoundly felt to be shadowy, and its great venture of faith, which is not a venture after all, were never more nobly or simply expressed than in that quiet "And now"—things being so—"what wait I for? My hope"—in contrast with the false directions which other men's takes—"to Thee it turns."

The burden is still on the psalmist's shoulders. His sufferings are not ended, though his trust has taken the poison out of them. Therefore his renewed grasp of God leads at once to prayer for deliverance from his "transgressions," in which cry may be included both sins and their chastisement. "The fool" is the name of a class, not of an individual, and, as always in Scripture, denotes moral and religious obliquity, not intellectual feebleness. The expression is substantially equivalent to "the wicked" of ver. 1, and a similar motive to that which

there induced the psalmist to be silent is here urged as a plea with God for the sufferer's deliverance. Taunts launched at a good man suffering will glance off him and appear to reach his God.

Ver. 9 pleads as a reason for God's deliverance the psalmist's silence under what he recognised as God's chastisement. The question arises whether this is the same silence as is referred to in vv. 1, 2, and many authorities take that view. But that silence was broken by a rush of words from a hot heart, and, if the account of the connection in the psalm given above is correct, by a subsequent more placid meditation and prayer. It would be irrelevant to recur to it here, especially as a plea with God. But there are two kinds of silence under His chastisements: one which may have for its motive regard to His honour, but is none the less tinged with rebellious thoughts, and brings no good to the sufferer, and another which is silence of heart and will, not of lips only, and soothes sorrow which the other only aggravated, and puts out the fire which the other fanned. Submission to God's hand discerned behind all visible causes is the blessed silence. "To lie still, let Him strike home, and bless the rod," is best. And when that is attained, the uses of chastisement are accomplished; and we may venture to ask God to burn the rod. The desire to be freed from its blow is not inconsistent with such submission. This prayer does not break the silence, though it may seem to do so, for this is the privilege of hearts that love God: that they can breathe desires to Him without His holding them unsubmissive to His supreme will.

The last part (vv. 10–13) is somewhat abnormally long, and falls into two parts separated by "Selah," which musical note does not here coincide with the

greater divisions. The two pairs of verses are both petitions for removal of sickness, either real or figurative. Their pleading persistence presents substantially the same prayer and supports it by the same considerations of man's transiency. The Pattern of perfect resignation thrice "prayed, saying the same words"; and His suffering followers may do the same, and yet neither sin by impatience, nor weary the Judge by their continual coming. The psalmist sees in his pains God's "stroke," and pleads the effects already produced on him as a reason for cessation. He is already "wasted by the assault of God's hand." One more buffet, and he feels that he must die. It is bold for a sufferer to say to God, "Hold! enough!" but all depends on the tone in which it is said. It may be presumption, or it may be a child's free speech, not in the least trenching on a Father's authority. The sufferer underrates his capacity of endurance, and often thinks, "I can bear no straw more"; but yet he has to bear it. Yet the psalmist's cry rests upon a deep truth: that God cannot mean to crush; therefore he goes on to a deeper insight into the meaning of that "stroke." It is not the attack of an enemy, but the "correction" of a friend.

If men regarded sorrows and sicknesses as rebukes for iniquity, they would better understand why sinful life, separated from God, is so fleeting. The characteristic ground tone of the Old Testament echoes here, according to which "the wages of sin is death." The commonplace of man's frailty receives a still more tragic colouring when thus regarded as a consequence of his sin. The psalmist has learned it in relation to his own sufferings, and, because he sees it so clearly, he pleads that these may cease. He looks on his own

wasted form; and God's hand seems to him to have taken away all that made it or life desirable and fair, as a moth would gnaw a garment. What a daring figure to compare the mightiest with the feeblest, the Eternal with the very type of evanescence!

The second subdivision of this part (vv. 12, 13) reiterates the former with some difference of tone. There is a beautiful climax of earnestness in the psalmist's appeal to God. His prayer swells into crying, and that again melts into tears, which go straight to the great Father's heart. Weeping eyes are never turned to heaven in vain; the gates of mercy open wide when the hot drops touch them. But his fervour of desire is not this suppliant's chief argument with God. His meditation has won for him deeper insight into that transiency which at first he had only laid like ice on his heart, to cool its feverish heat. He sees now more clearly, by reason of his effort to turn away his hope from earth and fix it on God, that his brief life has an aspect in which its brevity is not only calming, but exalting, and gives him a claim on God, whose guest he is while here, and with whom he has guest-rights, whether his stay is longer or shorter. "The land is mine, for ye are strangers and sojourners with me" (Lev. xxv. 23). That which was true in a special way of Israel's tenure of the soil is true for the individual, and true for ever. All men are God's guests; and if we betake ourselves behind the curtains of His tent, we have rights of shelter and sustenance. All the bitterness of the thought of the brevity of life is sucked out of it by such a confidence. If a man dwells with God, his Host will care for the needs, and not be indifferent to the tears, of His guest. The long generations which have come and gone like

shadows are not a melancholy procession out of nothing through vanity into nothing again, nor "disquieted in vain," if they are conceived as each in turn lodging for a little while in that same ancestral home which the present generation inhabits. It has seen many sons succeeding their fathers as its tenants, but its stately strength grows not old, and its gates are open to-day as they have been in all generations.

The closing prayer in ver. 13 has a strange sound. "Look away from me" is surely a singular petition, and the effect of God's averting His face is not less singular. The psalmist tninks that it will be his regaining cheerfulness and brightness, for he uses a word which means to clear up or to brighten, as the sky becomes blue again after storm. The light of God's face makes men's faces bright. "They cried unto God, and were lightened," not because He looked away from them, but because He regarded them. But the intended paradox gives the more emphatic expression to the thought that the psalmist's pains came from God's angry look, and it is that which he asks may be turned from him. That mere negative withdrawal, however, would have no cheering power, and is not conceivable as unaccompanied by the turning to the suppliant of God's loving regard. The devout psalmist had no notion of a neutral God, nor could he ever be contented with simple cessation of the tokens of Divine displeasure. The ever-outflowing Divine activity must reach every man. It may come in one or other of the two forms of favour or of displeasure, but come it will; and each man can determine which side of that pillar of fire and cloud is turned to him. On one side is the red glare of anger, on the other the white lustre of love. If the one is turned from, the other is turned to us.

Not less remarkable is the prospect of going away into non-being which the last words of the psalm present as a piteous reason for a little gleam of brightness being vouchsafed in this span-long life. There is no vision here of life beyond the grave; but, though there is not, the singer "throws himself into the arms of God." He does not seek to solve the problem of life by bringing the future in to redress the balance of good and evil. To him the solution lies in present communion with a present God, in whose house he is a guest now, and whose face will make his life bright, however short it may be.

PSALM XL.

1 Waiting, I waited for Jehovah,
And He bent to me and heard my [loud] cry.
2 And lifted me from the pit of destruction,
From the mire of the bog,
And set my feet on a rock—
Established my steps,
3 And put in my mouth a new song,
Praise unto our God.
Many shall see and fear,
And trust in Jehovah.

4 Blessed is the man who has made Jehovah his trust,
And has not turned [away] to the proud and deserters to a lie.
5 In multitudes hast Thou wrought, Jehovah, my God;
Thy wonders and Thy purposes towards us—
There is none to be set beside Thee—
Should I declare them and speak them,
They surpass numbering.

6 Sacrifice and meal-offering Thou didst not delight in—
Ears hast Thou pierced for me—
Burnt-offering and sin-offering Thou didst not demand.
7 Then I said, Behold, I am come—
In the roll of the book it is prescribed to me—
8 To do Thy pleasure, my God, I delight,
And Thy law is within my inmost parts.

9 I proclaimed glad tidings of Thy righteousness in the great congregation;
Behold, my lips I did not restrain,
Jehovah, Thou knowest.
10 Thy righteousness did I not hide within my heart;
Thy faithfulness and Thy salvation did I speak;
I concealed not Thy loving-kindness and Thy truth from the great congregation.

11 Thou, Jehovah, wilt not restrain Thy compassions from me;
Thy loving-kindness and Thy troth will continually preserve me.

12 For evils beyond numbering have compassed me;
My iniquities have overtaken me, and I am not able to see:
They surpass the hairs of my head,
And my heart has forsaken me.
13 Be pleased, Jehovah, to deliver me;
Jehovah, hasten to my help.
14 Shamed and put to the blush together be the seekers after my soul to carry it away!
Turned back and dishonoured be they who delight in my calamity!
15 Paralysed by reason of their shame
Be they who say to me, Oho! Oho!
16 Joyful and glad in Thee be all who seek Thee!
Jehovah be magnified, may they ever say who love Thy salvation!
17 But as for me, I am afflicted and needy;
The Lord purposes [good] for me:
My Help and my Deliverer art Thou;
My God, delay not.

THE closing verses of this psalm reappear with slight changes as an independent whole in Psalm lxx. The question arises whether that is a fragment or this a conglomerate. Modern opinion inclines to the latter alternative, and points in support to the obvious change of tone in the second part. But that change does not coincide with the supposed line of junction, since Psalm lxx. begins with our ver. 13, and the change begins with ver. 12. Cheyne and others are therefore obliged to suppose that ver. 12 is the work of a third poet or compiler, who effected a junction thereby. The cumbrousness of the hypothesis of fusion is plain, and its necessity is not apparent, for it is resorted to in order to explain how a psalm which keeps so lofty a level of confidence at first should drop to such keen consciousness of innumerable evils and such faint-heartedness. But surely such resurrection of apparently dead fears is not uncommon in devout,

sensitive souls. They live beneath April skies, not unbroken blue. However many the wonderful works which God has done and however full of thankfulness the singer's heart, his deliverance is not complete. The contrast in the two parts of the psalm is true to facts and to the varying aspects of feeling and of faith. Though the latter half gives greater prominence to encompassing evils, they appear but for a moment; and the prayer for deliverance which they force from the psalmist is as triumphant in faith as were the thanksgivings of the former part. In both the ground tone is that of victorious grasp of God's help, which in the one is regarded in its mighty past acts, and in the other is implored and trusted in for present and future needs. The change of tone is not such as to demand the hypothesis of fusion. The unity is further supported by verbal links between the parts: *e.g.*, the innumerable evils of ver. 12 pathetically correspond to the innumerable mercies of ver. 5, and the same word for "surpass" occurs in both verses; "be pleased" in ver. 13 echoes "Thy pleasure" (will, A.V.) in ver. 8; "cares" or *thinks* (A.V.) in ver. 17 is the verb from which the noun rendered *purposes* (thoughts, A.V.) in ver. 5 is derived.

The attribution of the psalm to David rests solely on the superscription. The contents have no discernible points of connection with known circumstances in his or any other life. Jeremiah has been thought of as the author, on the strength of giving a prosaic literal meaning to the obviously poetical phrase "the pit of destruction" (ver. 2). If it is to be taken literally, what is to be made of the "rock" in the next clause? Baethgen and others see the return from Babylon in the glowing metaphors of ver. 2, and, in accordance with their con-

ceptions of the evolution of spiritual religion, take the subordination of sacrifice to obedience as a clear token of late date. We may, however, recall 1 Sam. xv. 22, and venture to doubt whether the alleged process of spiritualising has been so clearly established, and its stages dated, as to afford a criterion of the age of a psalm.

In the first part, the current of thought starts from thankfulness for individual deliverances (vv. 1–3); widens into contemplation of the blessedness of trust and the riches of Divine mercies (vv. 4, 5); moved by these and taught what is acceptable to God, it rises to self-consecration as a living sacrifice (vv. 6–8); and, finally, pleads for experience of God's grace in all its forms on the ground of past faithful stewardship in celebrating these (vv. 9–11). The second part is one long-drawn cry for help, which admits of no such analysis, though its notes are various.

The first outpouring of the song is one long sentence, of which the clauses follow one another like sunlit ripples, and tell the whole process of the psalmist's deliverance. It began with patient waiting; it ended with a new song. The voice first raised in a cry, shrill and yet submissive enough to be heard above, is at last tuned into new forms of uttering the old praise. The two clauses of ver. 1 ("I" and "He") set over against each other, as separated by the distance between heaven and earth, the psalmist and his God. He does not begin with his troubles, but with his faith. "Waiting, he waited" for Jehovah; and wherever there is that attitude of tense and continuous but submissive expectance, God's attitude will be that of bending to meet it. The meek, upturned eye has power to draw His towards itself. That is an axiom of the devout life confirmed

by all experience, even if the tokens of deliverance delay their coming. Such expectance, however patient, is not inconsistent with loud crying, but rather finds voice in it. Silent patience and impatient prayer, in too great a hurry to let God take His own time, are equally imperfect. But the cry, "Haste to my help" (ver. 13), and the final petition, "My God, delay not," are consistent with true waiting.

The suppliant and God have come closer together in ver. 2, which should not be regarded as beginning a new sentence. As in Psalm xviii., prayer brings God down to help. His hand reaches to the man prisoned in a pit or struggling in a swamp; he is dragged out, set on a rock, and feels firm ground beneath his feet. Obviously the whole representation is purely figurative, and it is hopelessly flat and prosaic to refer it to Jeremiah's experience. The "many waters" of Psalm xviii. are a parallel metaphor. The dangers that threatened the psalmist are described as "a pit of destruction," as if they were a dungeon into which whosoever was thrown would come out no more, or in which, like a wild beast, he has been trapped. They are also likened to a bog or quagmire, in which struggles only sink a man deeper. But the edge of the bog touches rock, and there is firm footing and unhindered walking there, if only some great lifting power can drag the sinking man out. God's hand can, and does, because the lips, almost choked with mire, could yet cry. The psalmist's extremity of danger was probably much more desperate than is usual in such conditions as ours, so that his cries seem too piercing for us to make our own; but the terrors and conflicts of humanity are nearly constant quantities, though the occasions calling them forth are widely different. If we look

deeper into life than its surface, we shall learn that it is not violent "spiritualising" to make these utterances the expression of redeeming grace, since in truth there is but one or other of these two possibilities open for us. Either we flounder in a bottomless bog, or we have our feet on the Rock.

God's deliverance gives occasion for fresh praise. The psalmist has to add his voice to the great chorus, and this sense of being but one of a multitude, who have been blessed alike and therefore should bless alike, occasions the significant interchange in ver. 3 of "my" and "our," which needs no theory of the speaker being the nation to explain it. It is ever a joy to the heart swelling with the sense of God's mercies to be aware of the many who share the mercies and gratitude. The cry for deliverance is a solo; the song of praise is choral. The psalmist did not need to be bidden to praise; a new song welled from his lips as by inspiration. Silence was more impossible to his glad heart than even to his sorrow. To shriek for help from the bottom of the pit and to be dumb when lifted to the surface is a churl's part.

Though the song was new in this singer's mouth, as befitted a recipient of deliverances fresh from heaven, the theme was old; but each new voice individualises the commonplaces of religious experience, and repeats them as fresh. And the result of one man's convinced and jubilant voice, giving novelty to old truths because he has verified them in new experiences, will be that "many shall see," as though they behold the deliverance of which they hear, "and shall fear" Jehovah and trust themselves to Him. It was not the psalmist's deliverance, but his song, that was to be the agent in this extension of the fear of Jehovah. All great poets

have felt that their words would win audience and live. Thus, even apart from consciousness of inspiration, this lofty anticipation of the effect of his words is intelligible, without supposing that their meaning is that the signal deliverance of the nation from captivity would spread among heathens and draw them to Israel's faith.

The transition from purely personal experience to more general thoughts is completed in vv. 4, 5. Just as the psalmist began with telling of his own patient expectance and thence passed on to speak of God's help, so in these two verses he sets forth the same sequence in terms studiously cast into the most comprehensive form. Happy indeed are they who can translate their own experience into these two truths for all men: that trust is blessedness and that God's mercies are one long sequence, made up of numberless constituent parts. To have these for one's inmost convictions and to ring them out so clearly and melodiously that many shall be drawn to listen, and then to verify them by their own "seeing," is one reward of patient waiting for Jehovah. That trust must be maintained by resolute resistance to temptations to its opposite. Hence the negative aspect of trust is made prominent in ver. 4 *b*, in which the verb should be rendered "turns not" instead of "respecteth not," as in the A.V. and R.V. The same motion, looked at from opposite sides, may be described in turning to and turning from. Forsaking other confidences is part of the process of making God one's trust. But it is significant that the antithesis is not completely carried out, for those to whom the trustful heart does not turn are not here, as might have been expected, rival objects of trust, but those who put their own trust in false

refuges. "The proud" are the class of arrogantly self-reliant people who feel no need of anything but their own strength to lean on. "Deserters to a lie" are those who fall away from Jehovah to put their trust in any creature, since all refuges but Himself will fail. Idols may be included in this thought of *a lie*, but it is unduly limited if confined to them. Much rather it takes in all false grounds of security. The antithesis fails in accuracy, for the sake of putting emphasis on the prevalence of such mistaken trust, which makes it so much the harder to keep aloof from the multitudes and stand alone in reliance on Jehovah.

Ver. 5 corresponds with ver. 4, in that it sets forth in similar generality the great deeds with which God is wont to answer man's trust. But the personality of the poet breaks very beautifully through the impersonal utterances at two points: once when he names Jehovah as "my God," thus claiming his separate share in the general mercies and his special bond of connection with the Lover of all; and once when he speaks of his own praises, thus recognising the obligation of individual gratitude for general blessings. Each particle of finely comminuted moisture in the rainbow has to flash back the broad sunbeam at its own angle. God's "wonders and designs" are "realised Divine thoughts and Divine thoughts which are gradually being realised" (Delitzsch). These are wrought and being wrought in multitudes innumerable; and, as the psalmist sees the bright, unbroken beams pouring forth from their inexhaustible source, he breaks into an exclamation of adoring wonder at the incomparable greatness of the ever-giving God. "There is none to set beside Thee" is far loftier and more accordant with the tone of the verse than the compara-

tively flat and incongruous remark that God's mercies cannot be told to Him (A.V. and R.V.). A precisely similar exclamation occurs in Psalm lxxi. 19, in which God's incomparable greatness is deduced from the great things which He has done. Happy the singer who has an inexhaustible theme! He is not silenced by the consciousness of the inadequacy of his songs, but rather inspired to the never-ending, ever-beginning, joyful task of uttering some new fragment of that transcendent perfection. Innumerable wonders wrought should be met by ever-new songs. If they cannot be counted, the more reason for open-eyed observance of them as they come, and for a stream of praise as unbroken as is their bright continuance.

If God's mercies thus baffle enumeration and beggar praise, the question naturally rises, "What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits?" Therefore the next turn of thought shows the psalmist as reaching the lofty spiritual conception that heartfelt delight in God's will is the true response to God's wonders of love. He soars far above external rites as well as servile obedience to unloved authority, and proclaims the eternal and ultimate truth that what God delights in is man's delight in His will. The great words which rang the knell of Saul's kingship may well have sounded in his successor's spirit. Whether they are the source of the language of our psalm or not, they are remarkably similar. "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. xv. 23), teaches precisely the same lesson as vv. 6–8 of this psalm. The strong negation in ver. 6 does not deny the Divine institution of the sacrificial law, but affirms that something much deeper than external sacrifices is the real object of God's desire. The negation is made emphatic by enumerating

the chief kinds of sacrifice. Whether they are bloody or bloodless, whether meant to express consecration or to effect reconciliation, they are none of them the true sacrifices of God. In ver. 6 the psalmist is entirely occupied with God's declarations of His requirements; and he presents these in a remarkable fashion, intercalating the clause, "Ears hast Thou pierced for me," between the two parallel clauses in regard to sacrifice. Why should the connection be thus broken? The fact that God has endowed the psalmist with capacity to apprehend the Divine speech reveals God's desire concerning him. Just because he has ears to hear, it is clear that God wishes him to hear, and therefore that outward acts of worship cannot be the acknowledgment of mercies in which God delights. The central clause of the verse is embedded in the others, because it deals with a Divine act which, pondered, will be seen to establish their teaching. The whole puts in simple, concrete form a wide principle, namely, that the possession of capacity for receiving communications of God's will imposes the duty of loving reception and obedience, and points to inward joyful acceptance of that will as the purest kind of worship.

Vv. 7 and 8 are occupied with the response to God's requirements thus manifested by His gift of capacity to hear His voice. "Then said I." As soon as he had learned the meaning of his ears he found the right use of his tongue. The thankful heart was moved to swift acceptance of the known will of God. The clearest recognition of His requirements may coexist with resistance to them, and needs the impulse of loving contemplation of God's unnumbered wonders to vivify it into glad service. "Behold, I am come," is the language of a servant entering his master's presence in

obedience to his call. In ver. 7 the second clause interrupts just as in ver. 6. There the interruption spoke of the organ of receiving Divine messages as to duty; here it speaks of the messages themselves: "In the roll of the book is my duty prescribed for me." The promise implied in giving ears is fulfilled by giving a permanent written law. This man, having ears to hear, has heard, and has not only heard, but welcomed into the inmost recesses of his heart and will, the declared will of God. The word rendered "delight" in ver. 8 is the same as is rendered "desire" in ver. 6 (A.V.); and that rendered by the A.V. and R.V. in ver. 8 "will" is properly "good pleasure." Thus God's delight and man's coincide. Thankful love assimilates the creature's will with the Divine, and so changes tastes and impulses that desire and duty are fused into one. The prescriptions of the book become the delight of the heart. An inward voice directs. "Love, and do what Thou wilt"; for a will determined by love cannot but choose to please its Beloved. Liberty consists in freely willing and victoriously doing what we ought, and such liberty belongs to hearts whose supreme delight is to please the God whose numberless wonders have won their love and made their thanksgivings poor. The law written in the heart was the ideal even when a law was written on tables of stone. It was the prophetic promise for the Messianic age. It is fulfilled in the Christian life in the measure of its genuineness. Unless the heart delights in the law, acts of obedience count for very little.

The quotation of vv. 7, 8, in Heb. x. 5–7, is mainly from the LXX., which has the remarkable rendering of ver. 6 *b*, "A body hast Thou prepared for me." Probably this is meant as paraphrase rather than as translation;

and it does represent substantially the idea of the original, since the body is the instrument for fulfilling, just as the ear is the organ for apprehending, the uttered will of God. The value of the psalm for the writer of Hebrews does not depend on that clause, but on the whole representation which it gives of the ideal of the perfectly righteous servant's true worship, as involving the setting aside of sacrifice and the decisive pre-eminence of willing obedience. That ideal is fulfilled in Jesus, and really pointed onwards to Him. This use of the quotation does not imply the directly Messianic character of the psalm.

"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh," and thus the passage is easy from inward delight in God's will to public declaration of His character. Every true lover of God is a witness of His sweetness to the world. Since the psalmist had His law hidden in the depths of his being, he could not "hide" His righteousness within his heart, but must magnify it with his tongue. That is a feeble and doubtful love which knows no necessity of utterance. To "love and be silent" is sometimes imperative, but always burdensome; and a heart happy in its love cannot choose but ripple out in music of speech. The psalmist describes himself as a messenger of glad tidings, a true evangelist. The multiplicity of names for the various aspects of God's character and acts which he heaps together in these verses serves to indicate their manifoldness, which he delighted to contemplate, and his long, loving familiarity with them. He sets his treasure in all lights, and views it from all points, as a man will turn a jewel in his hand and get a fresh flash from every facet. "Righteousness," the good news that the Ruler of all is inflexibly just, with

a justice which scrupulously meets all creatures' needs and becomes penal and awful only to the rejecters of its tender aspect; "faithfulness," the inviolable adherence to every promise; "salvation," the actual fulness of deliverance and well-being flowing from these attributes; 'loving-kindness" and "troth," often linked together as expressing at once the warmth and the unchangeableness of the Divine heart—these have been the psalmist's themes. Therefore they are his hope; and he is sure that, as he has been their singer, they will be his preservers. Ver. 11 is not prayer, but bold confidence. It echoes the preceding verse, since "I did not restrain" (ver. 9) corresponds with "Thou wilt not restrain," and "Thy loving-kindness and Thy troth" with the mention of the same attributes in ver. 10. The psalmist is not so much asserting his claims as giving voice to his faith. He does not so much think that his utterance is deserving of remuneration as that God's character makes impossible the supposition that he, who had so loved and sung His great name in its manifold glories, should find that name unavailing in his hour of need.

There is an undertone of such felt need even in the confidence of ver. 11; and it becomes dominant from ver. 12 to the end, but not so as to overpower the clear note of trust. The difference between the two parts of the psalm is great, but is not to be exaggerated as if it were contrariety. In the former part thanksgiving for deliverance from dangers recently past predominates; in the latter, petition for deliverance from dangers still threatening: but in both the psalmist is exercising the same confidence; and if in the beginning he hymns the praises of God who brought him out of the pit of destruction, in the end he

keeps firm hold of Him as His "Help and Deliverer." Similarly, while in the first portion he celebrates the "purposes which are to usward," in the latter he is certain that, needy as he is, Jehovah has "purposes" of kindness to him. The change of tone is not so complete as to negative the original unity, and surely it is not difficult to imagine a situation in which both halves of the psalm should be appropriate. Are there any deliverances in this perilous and incomplete life so entire and permanent that they leave no room for future perils? Must not prevision of coming dangers accompany thankfulness for past escapes? Our Pharaohs are seldom drowned in the Red Sea, and we do not often see their corpses stretched on the sand. The change of tone, of which so much use is made as against the original unity of the psalm, begins with ver. 12; but that verse has a very strong and beautiful link of connection with the previous part, in the description of besetting evils as innumerable. Both words of ver. 5 are repeated, that for "surpass" or "are more than" in ver. 12 *c*, that for "number" in *a*. The heart that has felt how innumerable are God's thoughts and deeds of love is not utterly reduced to despair, even while it beholds a sea of troubles rolling its white-crested billows shoreward as far as the horizon. The sky stretches beyond them, and the true numberlessness of God's mercies outdoes the great yet really limited range of apparently numberless sins or sorrows, the consequences of sin. "Mine iniquities have overtaken me" like pursuing foes, and every calamity that held him in its grip was a child of a sin of his. Such consciousness of transgression is not inconsistent with "delight in the law of God after the inward man," as Paul found out (Rom. vii. 22, 23), but it sets aside the

attempt to make this a directly Messianic psalm. "I am not able to see." Such is the only possible rendering, for there is no justification for translating the simple word by "look up." Either the crowd of surrounding calamities prevent the psalmist from seeing anything but themselves, or, more probably, the failure of vital power accompanying his sorrow dims his vision (Psalm xxxviii. 10).

From ver. 13 onwards Psalm lxx. repeats this psalm, with unimportant verbal differences. The first of these is the omission of "Be pleased" in ver. 13, which binds this second part to the first, and points back to "Thy pleasure" (ver. 8). The prayer for the confusion of enemies closely resembles that in Psalm xxxv., ver. 14 being almost identical with vv. 4 and 26 there, and ver. 15 recalling ver. 21 of that psalm. The prayer that enemies may fail in their designs is consistent with the most Christlike spirit, and nothing more is asked by the psalmist, but the tinge of satisfaction with which he dwells on their discomfiture, however natural, belongs to the less lofty moral standard of his stage of revelation. He uses extraordinarily forcible words to paint their bewilderment and mortification—may they blush, turn pale, be driven back, be as if paralysed with shame at their baffled malice! The prayer for the gladness of God's servants and seekers is like Psalm xxxv. 27. It asks that fruition as complete as the disappointment of the foes may be the lot of those whose desires set towards God, and it is prophecy as well as prayer. Seekers after God ever find Him, and are more joyful in possession than they hoped to be while seeking. He alone never eludes search, nor ever disappoints attainment. They who long for His salvation will receive it; and their reception will fill

their hearts so full of blessedness that their lips will not be able to refrain from ever-new outbursts of the old praise, "The Lord be magnified."

Very plaintively and touchingly does the low sigh of personal need follow this triumphant intercession for the company of the saints. Its triple elements blend in one believing aspiration, which is not impatience, though it pleads for swift help. "I am afflicted and needy"; there the psalmist turns his eye on his own sore necessity. "Jehovah has purposes for me"; there he turns to God, and links his final petitions with his earlier trust by the repetition of the word by which he described (ver. 5) the many gracious designs of God. "My God, delay not"; there he embraces both in one act of faithful longing. His need calls for, and God's loving counsels ensure, swift response. He who delights when an afflicted and poor man calls Him "my God" will not be slack to vindicate His servant's confidence, and magnify His own name. That appeal goes straight to the heart of God.

PSALM XLI.

Happy the man who considers the helpless;
In the day of calamity will Jehovah deliver him.
2 Jehovah will preserve him and keep him alive,
—He shall be counted happy in the land,—
And do not Thou give him up to the wrath of his enemies.
3 Jehovah will sustain him on the bed of languishing;
All his lying down in his sickness Thou hast turned into health.

4 As for me, I said, Jehovah, be merciful to me,
Heal my soul, for I have sinned against Thee.
5 My enemies speak evil against me:
"When will he die, and his name perish?"
6 And if one [of them] comes to see [me], he speaks falsehood (insincere sympathy);
His heart collects malice for itself;
He goes forth, he speaks it.

7 Together against me do all my haters whisper;
Against me they plan my hurt:
8 "A fatal thing is fixed upon him,
And he who has [now] lain down will rise no more."
9 Even the man of my peace, in whom I trusted, who ate my bread,
Has lifted his heel against me.

10 But Thou, Jehovah, be merciful to me and raise me up,
That I may requite them.
11 By this I know that Thou delightest in me,
Since my enemy triumphs not over me.
12 And as for me, in my integrity Thou upholdest me,
And settest me before Thy face for ever.

13 Blessed be Jehovah, the God of Israel,
From everlasting and to everlasting
Amen and Amen.

THE central mass of this psalm describes the singer as suffering from two evils: sickness and treacherous friends. This situation naturally leads up

to the prayer and confidence of the closing strophe (vv. 10–12). But its connection with the introductory verses (1–3) is less plain. A statement of the blessings ensured to the compassionate seems a singular introduction to the psalmist's pathetic exhibition of his sorrows. Cheyne thinks that the opening verses were added by the framer of the collection to adapt the poem to the use of the Church of his own time, and that "the original opening must have been different" ("Orig. of Psalt.," 246, *n.*). It is to be observed, however, that the two points of the psalmist's affliction are the two from which escape is assured to the compassionate, who shall not be "delivered to the desire of his enemies," and shall be supported and healed in sickness. Probably, therefore, the general promises of vv. 1–3 are silently applied by the psalmist to himself; and he is comforting his own sorrow with the assurance which in his humility he casts into impersonal form. He has been merciful, and believes, though things look dark, that he will obtain mercy. There is probably also an intentional contrast with the cruel exacerbation of his sufferings by uncompassionate companions, which has rubbed salt into his wounds. He has a double consciousness in these opening verses, inasmuch as he partly thinks of himself as the compassionate man and partly as the "weak" one who is compassionated.

The combination of sickness and treachery is remarkable, especially if the former is taken literally, as the strongly marked details seem to require. The sick man is visited by an insincere sympathiser, who is all eyes to note symptoms of increasing weakness, and all tongue, as soon as he gets out of the sick-room, to give the result, which is to his malice the better the worse it is. Such a picture looks as if drawn from life, and the

sketch of the traitor friend seems to be a portrait of a real person. The supporters of the post-exilic date and national interpretation of the psalm have not succeeded in pointing out who the false friends of Israel were, who seemed to condole with, and really rejoiced over, its weakness, or who were the treacherous allies who failed it. The theory of the Davidic origin has in its favour the correspondence of Ahithophel's treason with the treachery of the trusted friend in the psalm; and, while it must be admitted that there is no mention of sickness in the narrative in 2 Samuel, the supposition that trouble of conscience had brought illness gains some countenance from Psalm xxxii., if it is Davidic, and would naturally explain David's singular passiveness whilst Absalom was hatching his plot.

The psalm may be divided into four strophes, of which, however, the two middle ones cohere very closely. Vv. 1–3 give the mercy requited to the merciful; vv. 4–6, after a brief prayer and confession begin the picture of the psalmist's sufferings, which is carried on through the next strophe (vv. 7–9), with the difference that in the former the scene is mainly the sick man's chamber, and in the latter the meeting-place of the secret conspirators. Vv. 10–12 build on this picture of distress a prayer for deliverance, and rise to serene confidence in its certain answer. The closing doxology is not part of the psalm, but is appended as the conclusion of the first book of the Psalter.

The principle that God's dealings with us correspond to our dealings with men, as clouds are moulded after the curves of the mountains which they touch, is no less characteristic of the New Testament than of the Old. The merciful obtain mercy; God forgives those

who forgive their brethren. The absoluteness of statement in this psalm is, of course, open to misunderstanding; but the singer had not such a superficial view of his relations to God as to suppose that kindly sympathy was the sole condition of Divine compassion. That virtue, the absence of which added pangs to his pains, might well seem to a sufferer writhing under the bitterness of its opposite the Divinest of all excellencies, and worthiest of recompense. That its requital should be mainly considered as consisting in temporal deliverance and physical health is partly due to the characteristics of the Old Testament promises of blessedness, and partly to the psalmist's momentary needs. We have noted that these are reflected in the blessings promised in vv. 1–3. The "happy" of ver. 1 is caught up in the abruptly introduced "He shall be counted happy" of ver. 2, which may carry tacit reference to the malicious slanders that aggravated the psalmist's sufferings, and anticipates deliverance so perfect that all who see him shall think him fortunate. The next clause rises into direct address of Jehovah, and is shown by the form of the negative in the Hebrew to be petition, not assertion, thus strongly confirming the view that "me" lurks below "him" in this context. A similar transition from the third to the second person occurs in ver. 3, as if the psalmist drew closer to his God. There is also a change of tense in the verbs there: "Jehovah *will* sustain"; "Thou *hast* turned," the latter tense converting the general truth expressed in the former clause into a fact of experience. The precise meaning of this verse is questioned, some regarding both clauses as descriptive of tender nursing, which sustains the drooping head and smoothes the crumpled bedding, while others, noting that the word rendered "bed"

(A.V. and R.V.) in the second clause means properly "lying down," take that clause as descriptive of turning sickness into convalescence. The latter meaning gives a more appropriate ending to the strophe, as it leaves the sick man healed, not tossing on a disordered bed, as the other explanation does. Jehovah does not half cure.

The second and third strophes (vv. 4–9) are closely connected. In them the psalmist recounts his sorrows and pains, but first breathes a prayer for mercy, and bases it no longer on his mercifulness, but on his sin. Only a shallow experience will find contradiction here to either the former words, or to the later profession of "integrity" (ver. 12). The petition for soul-healing does not prove that sickness in the following verses is figurative, but results from the belief that sorrow is the effect of sin, a view which belongs to the psalmist's stage of revelation, and is not to be held by Christians in the same absolute fashion. If the Davidic origin of the psalm is recognised, the connection of the king's great sin with all his after-sorrows is patent. However he had been merciful and compassionate in general, his own verdict on the man in Nathan's parable was that he "showed no pity," and that sin bore bitter fruit in all his life. It was the parent of all the sensual outrages in his own house; it underlay Ahithophel's treachery; it had much to do in making his reign abhorred; it brought the fuel which Absalom fired, and if our supposition is right as to the origin of the sickness spoken of in this psalm, that sin and the remorse that followed it gnawed at the roots of bodily health. So the psalmist, if he is indeed the royal sinner, had need to pray for soul-healing first, even though he was conscious of much compassion and hoped for its recompense. While

he speaks thus to Jehovah, his enemies speak in a different tone. The "evil" which they utter is not calumny, but malediction. Their hatred is impatient for his death. The time seems long till they can hear of it. One of them comes on a hypocritical visit of solicitude ("see" is used for visiting the sick in 2 Kings viii. 29), and speaks lying condolence, while he greedily collects encouraging symptoms that the disease is hopeless. Then he hurries back to tell how much worse he had found the patient; and that ignoble crew delight in the good news, and send it flying. This very special detail goes strongly in favour of the view that we have in this whole description a transcript of literal, personal experience. There were plenty of concealed enemies round David in the early stages of Absalom's conspiracy, who would look eagerly for signs of his approaching death, which might save the need of open revolt and plunge the kingdom into welcome confusion. The second strophe ends with the exit of the false friend.

The third (vv. 7–9) carries him to the meeting-place of the plotters, who eagerly receive and retail the good news that the sick man is worse. They feed their ignoble hate by picturing further ill as laying hold of him. Their wish is parent to their thought, which is confirmed by the report of their emissary. "A thing of Belial is poured out on him," or "is fastened upon him," say they. That unusual expression may refer either to moral or physical evil. In the former sense it would here mean the sufferer's sin, in the latter a fatal disease. The connection makes the physical reference the more likely. This incurable disease is conceived of as "poured out," or perhaps as "molten on him," so that it cannot be separated from him.

Therefore he will never rise from his sick-bed. But even this murderous glee is not the psalmist's sharpest pang. "The man of my peace," trusted, honoured, admitted to the privileges, and therefore bound by the obligations, of hospitality so sacred in the old world, has kicked the prostrate sufferer, as the ass in the fable did the sick lion. The treachery of Ahithophel at once occurs to mind. No doubt many treacherous friends have wounded many trustful hearts, but the correspondence of David's history with this detail is not to be got rid of by the observation that treachery is common. Still less is it sufficient to quote Obad. 7, where substantially the same language is employed in reference to the enemies of Edom, as supporting the national reference of the present passage. No one denies that false allies may be described by such a figure, or that nations may be personified; but is there any event in the post-exilic history which shows Israel deceived and spurned by trusted allies? The Davidic authorship and the personal reference of the psalm are separable. But if the latter is adopted, it will be hard to find any circumstances answering so fully to the details of the psalm as the Absalomic rebellion and Ahithophel's treason. Our Lord's quotation of part of ver. 9, with the significant omission of "in whom I trusted," does not imply the Messianic character of the psalm, but is an instance of an event and a saying which were not meant as prophetic, finding fuller realisation in the life of the perfect type of suffering godliness than in the original sufferer.

The last strophe (vv. 10–12) recurs to prayer, and soars to confidence born of communion. A hand stretched out in need and trust soon comes back filled with blessings. Therefore here the moment of true

petition is the moment of realised answer. The prayer traverses the malicious hopes of enemies. They had said, "He will rise no more"; it prays, "Raise me up." It touches a note which sounds discordant in the desire "that I may requite them"; and it is far more truly reverential and appreciative of the progress of revelation to recognise the relative inferiority of the psalmist's wish to render *quid pro quo* than to put violence on his words, in order to harmonise them with Christian ethics, or to slur over the distinction between the Law, of which the keynote was retribution, and the Gospel, of which it is forgiveness.

But the last words of the psalm are sunny with the assurance of present favour and with boundless hope. The man is still lying on his sick-bed, ringed by whispering foes. There is no change without, but this change has passed: that he has tightened his hold of God, and therefore can feel that his enemies' whispers will never rise or swell into a shout of victory over him. He can speak of the future deliverance as if present; and he can look ahead over an indefinite stretch of sunlit country, scarcely knowing whether the furthest point is earth or no. His integrity is not sinless, nor does he plead it as a reason for Jehovah's upholding, but hopes for it as the consequence of His sustaining hand. He knows that he will have close approach to Jehovah; and though, no doubt, "for ever" on his lips meant less than it does on ours, his assurance of continuous communion with God reached, if not to actual, clear consciousness of immortality, at all events to assurance of a future so indefinitely extended, and so brightened by the sunlight of God's face, that it wanted but little additional extension or brightening to be the full assurance of life immortal.

BOOK II.

PSALMS XLII.—LXXII.

PSALMS XLII., XLIII.

Psalm xlii.

1 Like a hind which pants after the water-brooks,
So pants my soul after Thee, O God.
2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God;
When shall I come and appear before God?
3 My tears have been bread to me day and night,
While they say to me all the day, Where is thy God?
4 This would I remember, and pour out my soul in me,
How I went with the throng, led them in procession to the house of God,
With shrill cries of joy and thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival.
5 Why art thou bowed down, my soul, and moanest within me?
Hope in God, for I shall yet give Him thanks,
[As] the help of my countenance and my God.

6 Within me is my soul bowed down;
Therefore let me remember Thee from the land of Jordan and of the Hermons, from Mount Mizar.
7 Flood calls to flood at the voice of Thy cataracts;
All Thy breakers and rollers are gone over me.
8 [Yet] by day will Jehovah command His loving-kindness,
And in the night shall a song to Him be with me,
[Even] a prayer to the God of my life.
9 Let me say to God my Rock, Why hast Thou forgotten me?
Why must I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?
10 As if they crushed my bones, my adversaries reproach me,
Whilst all the day they say to me, Where is thy God?
11 Why art thou bowed down, my soul, and why moanest thou within me?
Hope thou in God, for I shall yet give Him thanks
[As] the help of my countenance and my God.

PSALM XLIII.

1 Do me right, O God, and plead my plea against a loveless nation;
From the man of fraud and mischief rescue me.
2 For Thou art God my stronghold; why hast Thou cast me off?
Why must I wearily go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?
3 Send out Thy light and Thy troth; let them lead me;
Let them bring me to Thy holy hill and to Thy tabernacles,
4 That I may come in to the altar of God,
To God, the gladness of my joy,
And give Thee thanks with the harp, O God, my God.
5 Why art thou bowed down, my soul, and why moanest thou within me?
Hope in God, for I shall yet give Him thanks,
[As] the help of my countenance and my God.

THE second book of the Psalter is characterised by the use of the Divine name "Elohim" instead of "Jehovah." It begins with a cluster of seven psalms (reckoning Psalms xlii. and xliii. as one) of which the superscription is most probably regarded as ascribing their authorship to "the sons of Korach." These were Levites, and (according to 1 Chron. ix. 19 *seq.*) the office of keepers of the door of the sanctuary had been hereditary in their family from the time of Moses. Some of them were among the faithful adherents of David at Ziklag (1 Chron. xii. 6), and in the new model of worship inaugurated by him the Korachites were doorkeepers and musicians. They retained the former office in the second Temple (Neh. xi. 19). The ascription of authorship to a group is remarkable, and has led to the suggestion that the superscription does not specify the authors, but the persons for whose use the psalms in question were composed. The Hebrew would bear either meaning; but if the latter is adopted, all these psalms are anonymous. The same construction is found in Book I. in Psalms xxv.–xxviii., xxxv.,

xxxvii., where it is obviously the designation of authorship, and it is naturally taken to have the same force in these Korachite psalms. It has been ingeniously conjectured by Delitzsch that the Korachite Psalms originally formed a separate collection entitled "Songs of the Sons of Korach," and that this title afterwards passed over into the superscriptions when they were incorporated in the Psalter. It may have been so, but the supposition is unnecessary. It was not exactly literary fame which psalmists hungered for. The actual author, as one of a band of kinsmen who worked and sang together, would, not unnaturally, be content to sink his individuality and let his song go forth as that of the band. Clearly the superscriptions rested upon some tradition or knowledge, else defective information would not have been acknowledged as it is in this one; but some name would have been coined to fill the gap.

The two psalms (xlii., xliii.) are plainly one. The absence of a title for the second, the identity of tone throughout, the recurrence of several phrases, and especially of the refrain, put this beyond doubt. The separation, however, is old, since it is found in the LXX. It is useless to speculate on its origin.

There is much in the psalms which favours the hypothesis that the author was a Korachite companion of David's in his flight before Absalom; but the locality described as that of the singer, does not entirely correspond to that of the king's retreat, and the description of the enemies is not easily capable of application in all points to his foes. The house of God is still standing; the poet has been there recently, and hopes soon to return and render praise. Therefore the psalm must be pre-exilic; and while there is no certainty attainable as to date, it may at least be said that the circum-

stances of the singer present more points of contact with those of the supposed Korachite follower of David's fortunes on the uplands across Jordan than with those of any other of the imaginary persons to whom modern criticism has assigned the poem. Whoever wrote it has given immortal form to the longings of the soul after God. He has fixed for ever and made melodious a sigh.

The psalm falls into three parts, each closing with the same refrain. Longings and tears, remembrances of festal hours passed in the sanctuary melt the singer's soul, while taunting enemies hiss continual sarcasms at him as forsaken by his God. But his truer self silences these lamentations, and cheers the feebler "soul" with clear notes of trust and hope, blown in the refrain, like some trumpet-clang rallying dispirited fugitives to the fight. The stimulus serves for a moment; but once more courage fails, and once more, at yet greater length and with yet sadder tones, plaints and longings are wailed forth. Once more, too, the higher self repeats its half-rebuke, half-encouragement. So ends the first of the psalms; but obviously it is no real ending, for the victory over fear is not won, and longing has not become blessed. So once more the wave of emotion rolls over the psalmist, but with a new aspect which makes all the difference. He prays now; he had only remembered and complained and said that he would pray before. Therefore now he triumphs, and though he still is keenly conscious of his enemies, they appear but for a moment, and, though he still feels that he is far from the sanctuary, his heart goes out in hopeful visions of the gladness of his return thither, and he already tastes the rapture of the joy that will then flood his heart. Therefore the refrain comes for

a third time; and this time the longing, trembling soul continues at the height to which the better self has lifted it, and silently acknowledges that it need not have been cast down. Thus the whole song is a picture of a soul climbing, not without backward slips, from the depths to the heights, or, in another aspect, of the transformation of longing into certainty of fruition, which is itself fruition after a kind.

Perhaps the singer had seen, during his exile on the eastern side of Jordan, some gentle creature, with open mouth and heaving flanks, eagerly seeking in dry wadies for a drop of water to cool her outstretched tongue; and the sight had struck on his heart as an image of himself longing for the presence of God in the sanctuary. A similar bit of local colour is generally recognised in ver. 7. Nature reflects the poet's moods, and overmastering emotion sees its own analogues everywhere. That lovely metaphor has touched the common heart as few have done, and the solitary singer's plaint has fitted all devout lips. Injustice is done it, if it is regarded merely as the longing of a Levite for approach to the sanctuary. No doubt the psalmist connected communion with God and presence in the Temple more closely together than they should do who have heard the great charter, "neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem"; but, however the two things were coupled in his mind, they were sufficiently separate to allow of approach by longing and prayer while distant in body, and the true object of yearning was not access to the Temple, but communion with the God of the Temple.

The "soul" is feminine in Hebrew, and is here compared to the female deer, for "pants" is the feminine form of the verb, though its noun is masculine. It is

better therefore to translate "hind" than "hart." The "soul" is the seat of emotions and desires. It "pants" and "thirsts," is "cast down" and disquieted; it is "poured out"; it can be bidden to "hope." Thus tremulous, timid, mobile, it is beautifully compared to a hind. The true object of its longings is always God, however little it knows for what it is thirsting. But they are happy in their very yearnings who are conscious of the true direction of these, and can say that it is God for whom they are athirst. All unrest of longing, all fever of thirst, all outgoings of desire, are feelers put out blindly, and are only stilled when they clasp Him. The correspondence between man's needs and their true object is involved in that name "the living God"; for a heart can rest only in one all-sufficient Person, and must have a heart to throb against. Neither abstractions nor dead things can still its cravings. That which does must be living. But no finite being can still them; and after all sweetnesses of human loves and helps of human strengths, the soul's thirst remains unslaked, and the Person who is enough must be the living God. The difference between the devout and the worldly man is just that the one can only say, "My soul pants and thirsts," and the other can add "after Thee, O God."

This man's longing was intensified by his unwilling exile from the sanctuary, a special privation to a door-keeper of the Temple. His situation and mood closely resemble those in another Korachite psalm (lxxxiv.), in which, as here, the soul "faints for the courts of the Lord," and as here the panting hind, so there the glancing swallows flitting about the eaves are woven into the song. Unnamed foes taunt the psalmist with the question, "Where is thy God?" There is no

necessity to conclude that these were heathens, though the taunt is usually put into heathen lips (Psalms lxxix. 10; lii. 2) but it would be quite as natural from co-religionists, flouting his fervour and personal grasp of God and taking his sorrows as tokens of God's abandonment of him. That is the world's way with the calamities of a devout man, whose humble cry, "My God," it resents as presumption or hypocrisy.

But even these bitter sarcasms are less bitter than the remembrance of "happier things," which is his "sorrow's crown of sorrow." Yet, with the strange but universal love of summoning up remembrance of departed joys, the psalmist finds a certain pleasure in the pain of recalling how he, a Levite, led the festal march to the Temple, and in listening in fancy again to the shrill cries of joy which broke from the tumultuous crowd. The form of the verbs "remember" and "pour out" in ver. 4 indicates set purpose.

The higher self arrests this flow of self-pity and lamentation. The feminine soul has to give account of her moods to calmer judgment, and to be lifted and steadied by the strong spirit. The preceding verses have given ample reason why she has been dejected, but now she is summoned to repeat them to a judicial ear. The insufficiency of the circumstances described to warrant the vehement emotions expressed is implied in the summons. Feeling has to vindicate its rationality or to suppress itself, and its grounds have often only to be stated to the better self, to be found altogether disproportioned to the storm they have raised. It is a very elementary but necessary lesson for the conduct of life that emotion of all sorts, sad or glad, religious or other, needs rigid scrutiny and firm control, sometimes stimulating and sometimes chilling. The true

counterpoise to its excess lies in directing it to God and in making Him the object of hope and patient waiting. Emotion varies, but God is the same. The facts on which faith feeds abide while faith fluctuates. The secret of calm is to dwell in that inner chamber of the secret place of the Most High, which whoso inhabits "heareth not the loud winds when they call," and is neither dejected nor uplifted, neither disturbed by excessive joys nor torn by anxieties.

Ver. 5 has the refrain in a form slightly different from that of the other two instances of its occurrence (ver. 11 and xliii. 5). But probably the text is faulty. The shifting of the initial word of ver. 6 to the end of ver. 5, and the substitution of *My* for *His*, bring the three refrains into line, and avoid the harsh expression "help of His countenance." Since no reason for the variation is discernible, and the proposed slight change of text improves construction and restores uniformity, it is probably to be adopted. If it is, the second part of the psalm is also conformed to the other two in regard to its not beginning with the Divine name.

The break in the clouds is but momentary, and the grey wrack fills the sky once more. The second part of the psalm takes up the question of the refrain, and first reiterates with bitter emphasis that the soul *is* bowed down, and then pours out once more the stream of reasons for dejection. But the curb has not been applied quite in vain, for throughout the succeeding verses there is a striking alternation of despondency and hope. Streaks of brightness flash through the gloom. Sorrow is shot with trust. This conflict of opposite emotions is the characteristic of the second part of the psalm, while that of the first part is an all but unrelieved predominance of gloom, and that of

the third an all but undisputed victory of sunshine. Naturally this transition strophe is marked by the mingling of both. In the former part, memory was the handmaid of sorrow, and came involuntarily, and increased the singer's pain; but in this part he makes an effort of will to remember, and in remembrance finds an antidote to sorrow. To recall past joys adds stings to present grief, but to remember God brings an anodyne for the smart. The psalmist is far from the sanctuary, but distance does not hinder thought. This man's faith was not so dependent on externals that it could not come close to God while distant from His temple. It had been so far strengthened by the encouragement of the refrain that the reflux of sadness at once rouses it to action. "My soul is cast down; . . . *therefore* let me remember Thee." With wise resolve he finds in dejection a reason for nestling closer to God. In reference to the description of the psalmist's locality, Cheyne beautifully says, "The preposition 'from' is chosen (rather than 'in') with a subtle purpose. It suggests that the psalmist's faith will bridge over the interval between himself and the sanctuary: 'I can send my thoughts to Thee from the distant frontier'" (*in loc.*). The region intended seems to be "the north-eastern corner of Palestine, near the lower slopes of Hermon" (Cheyne, *u.s.*). The plural "Hermons" is probably used in reference to the group of crests. "Mizar" is probably the name of a hill otherwise unknown, and specifies the singer's locality more minutely, though not helpfully to us. Many ingenious attempts have been made to explain the name either as symbolical or as a common noun, and not a proper name, but these need not be dealt with here. The locality thus designated is too far north for the scene of David's retreat before

Absalom, unless we give an unusual southward extension to the names; and this makes a difficulty in the way of accepting the hypothesis of the author's having been in his retinue.

The twofold emotions of ver. 6 recur in vv. 7, 8, where we have first renewed despondency and then reaction into hope. The imagery of floods lifting up their voices, and cataracts sounding as they fall, and breaking waves rolling over the half-drowned psalmist has been supposed to be suggested by the scenery in which he was; but the rushing noise of Jordan in its rocky bed seems scarcely enough to deserve being described as "flood calling to flood," and "breakers and rollers" is an exaggeration if applied to any commotion possible on such a stream. The imagery is so usual that it needs no assumption of having been occasioned by the poet's locality. The psalmist paints his calamities as storming on him in dismal continuity, each "flood" seeming to summon its successor. They rush upon him, multitudinous and close following; they pour down on him as with the thunder of descending cataracts; they overwhelm him like the breakers and rollers of an angry ocean. The bold metaphors are more striking when contrasted with the opposite ones of the first part. The dry and thirsty land there and the rush of waters here mean the same thing, so flexible is nature in a poet's hands.

Then follows a gleam of hope, like a rainbow spanning the waterfall. With the alternation of mood already noticed as characteristic, the singer looks forward, even from the midst of overwhelming seas of trouble, to a future day when God will give His angel, Mercy or Loving-kindness, charge concerning him and draw him out of many waters. That day of extrication will surely

be followed by a night of music and of thankful prayer (for supplication is not the only element in prayer) to Him who by His deliverance has shown Himself to be the "God of" the rescued man's "life." The epithet answers to that of the former part, "the living God," from which it differs by but one additional letter. He who has life in Himself is the Giver and Rescuer of our lives, and to Him they are to be rendered in thankful sacrifice. Once more the contending currents meet in vv. 9 and 10, in the former of which confidence and hope utter themselves in the resolve to appeal to God and in the name given to Him as "my Rock"; while another surge of despondency breaks, in the question in which the soul interrogates God, as the better self had interrogated her, and contrasts almost reproachfully God's apparent forgetfulness, manifested by His delay in deliverance, with her remembrance of Him. It is not a question asked for enlightenment's sake, but is an exclamation of impatience, if not of rebuke. Ver. 10 repeats the enemies' taunt, which is there represented as like crushing blows which broke the bones. And then once more above this conflict of emotion soars the clear note of the refrain, summoning to self-command, calmness, and unfaltering hope.

But the victory is not quite won, and therefore Psalm xliii. follows. It is sufficiently distinct in tone to explain its separation from the preceding, inasmuch as it is prayer throughout, and the note of joy is dominant, even while an undertone of sadness links it with the previous parts. The unity is vouched by the considerations already noticed, and by the incompleteness of Psalm xlii. without such triumphant close and of Psalm xliii. without such despondent beginning. The prayer of vv. 1, 2, blends the two elements, which were

at war in the second part; and for the moment the darker is the more prominent. The situation is described as in the preceding parts. The enemy is called a "loveless nation." The word rendered "loveless" is compounded of the negative prefix and the word which is usually found with the meaning of "one whom God favours," or visits with loving-kindness. It has been much disputed whether its proper signification is active (one who shows loving-kindness) or passive (one who receives it). But, considering that loving-kindness is in the Psalter mainly a Divine attribute, and that, when a human excellence, it is regarded as derived from and being the echo of experienced Divine mercy, it is best to take the passive meaning as the principal, though sometimes, as unmistakably here, the active is more suitable. These loveless people are not further defined, and may either have been Israelites or aliens. Perhaps there was one "man" of special mischief prominent among them, but it is not safe to treat that expression as anything but a collective. Ver. 2 looks back to xlii. 9, the former clause in each verse being practically equivalent, and the second in xliii. being a quotation of the second in ver. 9, with a variation in the form of the verb to suggest more vividly the picture of weary, slow, dragging gait, fit for a man clad in mourning garb.

But the gloomier mood has shot its last bolt. Grief which finds no fresh words is beginning to dry up. The stage of mechanical repetition of complaints is not far from that of cessation of them. So the higher mood conquers at last, and breaks into a burst of joyous petition, which passes swiftly into realisation of the future joys whose coming shines thus far off. Hope and trust hold the field. The certainty of

return to the Temple overbears the pain of absence from it, and the vivid realisation of the gladness of worshipping again at the altar takes the place of the vivid remembrance of former festal approach thither. It is the prerogative of faith to make pictures drawn by memory pale beside those painted by hope. Light and Troth—*i.e.*, Loving-kindness and Faithfulness in fulfilling promises—are like two angels, despatched from the presence-chamber of God, to guide with gentleness the exile's steps. That is to say, because God is mercy and faithfulness, the return of the psalmist to the home of his heart is sure. God being what He is, no longing soul can ever remain unsatisfied. The actual return to the Temple is desired because thereby new praise will be occasioned. Not mere bodily presence there, but that joyful outpouring of triumph and gladness, is the object of the psalmist's longing. He began with yearning after the living God. In his sorrow he could still think of Him at intervals as the help of his countenance and call Him "my God." He ends with naming Him "the gladness of my joy." Whoever begins as he did will finish where he climbed. The refrain is repeated for a third time, and is followed by no relapse into sadness. The effort of faith should be persistent, even if old bitternesses begin again and "break the low beginnings of content"; for, even if the wild waters burst through the dam once and again, they do not utterly wash it away. and there remains a foundation on which it may be built up anew. Each swing of the gymnast lifts him higher, until he is on a level with a firm platform on which he can spring and stand secure. Faith may have a long struggle with fear, but it will have the last word, and that word will be "the help of my countenance and my God."

PSALM XLIV.

1 O God, with our ears we have heard,
Our fathers have told to us,
The work Thou didst work in their days,
In the days of yore.
2 Thou [with] Thy hand didst dispossess nations, and didst plant *them*,
Didst afflict peoples and spread *them* forth.
3 For not by their own sword did they possess the land,
And their own arm did not save them,
But Thy right hand and Thine arm, and the light of Thy face,
Because Thou hadst delight in them.
4 Thou Thyself art my King, O God;
Command salvations for Jacob.
5 Through Thee can we butt down our oppressors;
In Thy name can we trample those that rise against us.
6 For not in my own bow do I trust,
And my own sword does not save me.
7 But Thou hast saved us from our oppressors,
And our haters Thou hast put to shame.
8 In God have we made our boast all the day,
And Thy name will we thank for ever. Selah.

9 Yet Thou hast cast [us] off and shamed us,
And goest not forth with our hosts.
10 Thou makest us turn back from the oppressor,
And our haters plunder to their hearts' content.
11 Thou makest us like sheep for food,
And among the nations hast Thou scattered us.
12 Thou sellest Thy people at no profit,
And hast not increased [Thy wealth] by their price.
13 Thou makest us a reproach for our neighbours,
A mockery and derision to those around us.
14 Thou makest us a proverb among the nations,
A nodding of the head among the peoples.

15 All the day is my dishonour before me,
And the shame of my face has covered me,
16 Because of the voice of the rebuker and blasphemer,
Because of the face of the enemy and the revengeful.

17 All this is come upon us, and [yet] have we not forgotten Thee,
Nor been false to Thy covenant.
18 Our heart has not turned back,
Nor our footsteps swerved from Thy way,
19 That Thou shouldest have crushed us in the place of jackals,
And covered us with thick darkness.
20 If we had forgotten the name of our God
And spread out our hands to a strange God,
21 Would not God search out this? for He knows the secrets of the heart.
22 Nay, for Thy sake are we killed all the day;
We are reckoned as sheep for slaughter.

23 Awake; why sleepest Thou, Lord?
Arise; cast not off for ever.
24 Why hidest Thou Thy face,
Forgettest our affliction and oppression?
25 For bowed to the dust is our soul;
Our body cleaves to the earth.
26 Arise [for] a help for us,
And redeem us for Thy loving-kindness' sake.

CALVIN says that the authorship of this psalm is uncertain, but that it is abundantly clear that it was composed by any one rather than David, and that its plaintive contents suit best the time when the savage tyranny of Antiochus raged. No period corresponds to the situation which makes the background of the psalm so completely as the Maccabean, for only then could it be truly said that national calamities fell because of the nation's rigid monotheism. Other epochs have been thought of, so as to avoid the necessity of recognising Maccabean psalms, but none of them can be said to meet the conditions described in the psalm. The choice lies between accepting the Maccabean date and giving up the attempt to fix one at all

Objections to that late date based upon the history of the completion of the canon take for granted more accurate and complete knowledge of a very obscure subject than is possessed, and do not seem strong enough to negative the indications arising from the very unique fact, asserted in the psalm, that the nation was persecuted for its faith and engaged in a religious war. The psalm falls into four parts: a wistful look backwards to days already "old," when God fought for them (vv. 1–8); a sad contrast in present oppression (vv. 9–16); a profession of unfaltering national adherence to the covenant notwithstanding all these ills (vv. 17–22); and a fervent cry to a God who seems asleep to awake and rescue His martyred people (vv. 23–26).

The first part (vv. 1–8) recalls the fact that shone so brightly in all the past, the continual exercise of Divine power giving victory to their weakness, and builds thereon a prayer that the same law of His providence might be fulfilled now. The bitter side of the retrospect forces itself into consciousness in the next part, but here Memory is the handmaid of Faith. The whole process of the Exodus and conquest of Canaan is gathered up as one great "work" of God's hand. The former inhabitants of the land were uprooted like old trees, to give room for planting the "vine out of Egypt." Two stages in the settlement are distinguished in ver. 2: first came the "planting" and next the growth; for the phrase "didst spread them forth" carries on the metaphor of the tree, and expresses the extension of its roots and branches. The ascription of victory to God is made more emphatic by the negatives in ver. 3, which take away all credit of it from the people's own weapons or strength. The consciousness of our own impotence must accompany

adequate recognition of God's agency in our deliverances. The conceit of our own power blinds our vision of His working hand. But what moved His power? No merit of man's, but the infinite free grace of God's heart. "The light of Thy face" is the symbol of God's loving regard, and the deepest truth as to His acts of favour is that they are the outcome of His own merciful nature. He is His own motive. "Thou hadst delight in them" is the ultimate word, leading us into sacred abysses of self-existent and self-originated Deity. The spirit, then, of Israel's history is contained in these three thoughts: the positive assertion of God's power as the reason for their victories; the confirmatory negative, putting aside their own prowess; and the tracing of all God's work for them solely to His unmerited grace.

On this grand generalisation of the meaning of past centuries a prayer is built for their repetition in the prosaic present. The psalmist did not think that God was nearer in some majestic past than now. His unchangeableness had for consequence, as he thought, continuous manifestation of Himself in the same character and relation to His people. To-day is as full of God as any yesterday. Therefore ver. 4 begins with an emphatic recognition of the constancy of the Divine nature in that strong expression "Thou Thyself," and with an individualising transition for a moment to the singular in "my King," in order to give most forcible utterance to the thought that He was the same to each man of that generation as He had been to the fathers. On that unchanging relation rests the prayer, "Command salvations for (lit. *of*) Jacob," as if a multitude of several acts of deliverance stood before God, as servants waiting to

be sent on His errands. Just as God (Elohim) takes the place of Jehovah in this second book of the Psalter, so in it Jacob frequently stands for Israel. The prayer is no sooner spoken than the confidence in its fulfilment lifts the suppliant's heart buoyantly above present defeat, which will in the next turn of thought insist on being felt. Such is the magic of every act of true appeal to God. However dark the horizon, there is light if a man looks straight up. Thus this psalmist breaks into anticipatory pæans of victory. The vivid image of ver. 5 is taken from the manner of fighting common to wild horned animals, buffaloes and the like, who first prostrate their foe by their fierce charge and then trample him. The individualising "my" reappears in ver. 6, where the negation that had been true of the ancestors is made his own by the descendant. Each man must, as his own act, appropriate the universal relation of God to men and make God his God, and must also disown for himself reliance on himself. So he will enter into participation in God's victories. Remembrance of the victorious past and confidence in a like victorious future blend in the closing burst of praise and vow for its continuance, which vow takes for granted the future continued manifestation of deliverances as occasions for uninterrupted thanksgivings. Well might some long-drawn, triumphant notes from the instruments prolong the impression of the jubilant words.

The song drops in the second part (vv. 9–16) from these clear heights with lyric suddenness. The grim facts of defeat and consequent exposure to mocking laughter from enemies force themselves into sight, and seem utterly to contradict the preceding verses. But the first part speaks with the voice of faith, and the

second with that of sense, and these two may sound in very close sequence or even simultaneously. In ver. 9 the two verbs are united by the absence of "us" with the first; and the difference of tense in the Hebrew brings out the dependence of the second on the first, as effect and cause. God's rejection is the reason for the nation's disgrace by defeat. In the subsequent verses the thoughts of rejection and disgrace are expanded, the former in ver. 9 *b* to ver. 12, and the latter in vv. 13–16. The poet paints with few strokes the whole disastrous rout. We see the fated band going out to battle, with no Pillar of Cloud or Ark of the Covenant at their head. They have but their own weapons and sinews to depend on—not, as of old, a Divine Captain. No description of a fight under such conditions is needed, for it can have only one issue; and so the next clause shows panic-struck flight. Whoever goes into battle without God comes out of it without victory. Next follows plundering, as was the savage wont of these times, and there is no force to oppose the spoilers. The routed fugitives are defenceless and unresisting as sheep, and their fate is to be devoured, or possibly the expression "sheep for food" may be substantially equivalent to "sheep for the slaughter" (ver. 22), and may refer to the usual butchery of a defeated army. Some of them are slain and others carried off as slaves. The precise rendering of ver. 12 *b* is doubtful. Calvin, and, among the moderns, Hitzig, Ewald, Delitzsch, Cheyne, take it to mean "Thou didst not set their prices high." Others, such as Hupfeld, Baethgen, etc., adhere to the rendering, "Thou didst not increase [Thy wealth] by their price." The general sense is clear, and as bold as clear. It is almost sarcasm, directed against the Divine dealings: little has He gained by letting His

flock be devoured and scattered. Hupfeld attaches to the bitter saying a deep meaning: namely, that the "sale" did not take place "for the sake of profit or other external worldly ends, as is the case with men, but from higher disciplinary grounds of the Divine government—namely, simply as punishment for their sins, for their improvement." Rather it may indicate the dishonour accruing to the God, according to the ideas of the old world, when His votaries were defeated; or it may be the bitter reflection, "We can be of little worth in our Shepherd's eyes when He parts with us so easily." If there is any hint of tarnish adhering to the name of God by His people's defeat, the passage to the second main idea of this part is the easier.

Defeat brings dishonour. The nearer nations, such as Edomites, Ammonites, and other ancestral foes, are ready with their gibes. The more distant peoples make a proverb out of the tragedy, and nod their heads in triumph and scorn. The cowering creature, in the middle of this ring of mockers, is covered with shame as he hears the babel of heartless jests at his expense, and steals a glance at the fierce faces round him.

It is difficult to find historical facts corresponding with this picture. Even if the feature of selling into captivity is treated as metaphor, the rest of the picture needs some pressure to be made to fit the conditions of the Maccabean struggle, to which alone the subsequent avowals of faithfulness to God as the cause of calamity answer. For there were no such periods of disgraceful defeat and utter devastation when once that heroic revolt had begun. The third part of the psalm is in full accord with the religious consciousness of that Indian summer of national glories; but it must be acknowledged that the state of things described in

this second part does not fit quite smoothly into the hypothesis of a Maccabean date.

The third part (vv. 17–22) brings closely together professions of righteousness, which sound strangely in Christian ears, and complaints of suffering, and closes with the assertion that these two are cause and effect. The sufferers are a nation of martyrs, and know themselves to be so. This tone is remarkable when the nation is the speaker; for though we find individuals asserting innocence and complaining of undeserved afflictions in many psalms, a declaration of national conformity with the Law is in sharp contradiction both to history and to the uniform tone of prophets. This psalmist asserts not only national freedom from idolatry, but adherence in heart and act to the Covenant. No period before the exile was clear of the taint of idol worship and yet darkened by calamity. We have no record of any events before the persecutions that roused the Maccabean struggle which answer to the martyr cry of ver. 22: "For Thy sake we are killed all the day." It may, indeed, be questioned what is the relation in time of the two facts spoken of in vv. 17–19. Which comes first, the calamity or the steadfastness? Does the psalmist mean, "We are afflicted, and yet we are in affliction true to God," or "We were true to God, and yet are afflicted"? Probably the latter, as in the remainder of this part. "The place of jackals" is apparently the field of defeat referred to in the second part, where obscene creatures would gather to feast on the plundered corpses. The Christian consciousness cannot appropriate the psalmist's asseverations of innocence, and the difference between them and it should not be slurred over. But, on the other hand, his words should not be exaggerated into

charges of injustice against God, nor claims of absolute sinlessness. He does feel that present national distresses have not the same origin as past ones had had. There has been no such falling away as to account for them. But he does not arraign God's government. He knows why the miseries have come, and that he and his fellows are martyrs. He does not fling that fact down as an accusation of Providence, but as the foundation of a prayer and as a plea for God's help. The words may sound daring; still they are not blasphemy, but supplication.

The fourth part is importunate prayer. Its frank anthropomorphisms of a sleeping God, forgetting His people, surely need little defence. Sleep withdraws from knowledge of and action on the external world, and hence is attributed to God, when He allows evils to run unchecked. He is said to "awake," or, with another figure, to "arise," as if starting from His throned calm, when by some great act of judgment He smites flourishing evil into nothingness. Injustice is surely done to these cries of the *Ecclesia pressa* when they are supposed to be in opposition to the other psalmist's word: "He that keepeth Israel slumbers not, nor sleeps." Some commentators call these closing petitions commonplace; and so they are. Extreme need and agony of supplication have other things to think of than originality, and so long as sorrows are so commonplace and like each other, the cries of the sorrowful will be very much alike. God is pleased with well-worn prayers, which have fitted many lips, and is not so fastidious as some critics.

PSALM XLV.

1 My heart seethes [with] goodly speech;
I speak my work (poem) to a king:
My tongue is the pen of a swift scribe.

2 Thou art fair beyond the sons of men;
Grace is poured on thy lips:
Therefore God has blessed thee for ever.
3 Gird thy sword on thy thigh, O hero,
Thy splendour and thy majesty.
4 [And [in] thy majesty] press forward, ride on,
For the help of truth, and meekness-righteousness:
And thy right hand shall teach thee awe-striking deeds.
5 Thine arrows are keen—
The peoples fall under thee—
Into the heart of the enemies of the king.
6 Thy throne, O God, is for ever and aye:
7 A sceptre of uprightness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.
Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest iniquity:
Therefore God, thy God, has anointed thee
With the oil of gladness above thy fellows.
8 Myrrh and aloes [and] cassia [are] all thy robes;
Out of palaces of ivory, stringed instruments make thee glad.
9 Kings' daughters are among thy favourites:
The consort stands at thy right hand in Ophir gold.

10 Heaken, O daughter, and behold, and incline thine ear;
And forget thy people, and thy father's house;
11 So shall the king desire thy beauty:
For he is thy lord; and bow thou down to him.
12 And the daughter of Tyre [shall come] with a gift;
The richest among the peoples shall seek thy favour.
13 All glorious is the king's daughter in the inner palace:
Of cloth of gold is her garment.

14 In embroidered robes is she led to the king:
Maidens behind her, her friends, are brought to thee.
15 They are brought with gladness and exultation:
They enter into the palace of the king.

16 Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children:
Thou wilt make them princes in all the earth.
17 I will commemorate thy name through generation after generation:
Therefore shall the peoples praise thee for ever and aye.

THIS is an epithalamion or ode on a king's marriage. The usual bewildering variety of conjectures as to his identity meets us in commentaries. The older opinion points to Solomon's marriage to an Egyptian princess, to which it is objected that he was not a warrior king, as the monarch of the psalm is. Hitzig regards "daughter of Tyre," in ver. 12, as a vocative, and therefore looks for a king who married a Tyrian woman. He is obliged to go to the northern kingdom to find one, and pitches on Ahab, because Jezebel was the daughter of "a king of the Zidonians," and Ahab had an "ivory house" (1 Kings xxii. 39). It is hard to believe that that wedded pair of evil memory are the originals of the lovely portraits in the psalm, or that a psalmist would recognise the kingdom of Israel as divinely established and to be eternally upheld. Besides, the construction of ver. 12, on which this theory pivots, is doubtful, and the daughter of Tyre there mentioned is more probably one of the bringers of gifts to the bride. The attributes of the king and the promises for his descendants cannot be extended, without incongruity, beyond the Davidic line. Hence Delitzsch has selected Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, principally because his wife, Athaliah, was of Tyrian descent, being Jezebel's daughter, and partly because his father had been a trader, which accounts for the allusions to gold of Ophir and ivory.

These are slender grounds of identification, to say nothing of the miserable contrast which Jehoram's reign—a dreary record of apostasy and defeat, culminating in a tragic death and a dishonoured grave (2 Chron. xxi.)—would present to the psalm. Some commentators have thought of the marriage of a Persian king, mainly because the peculiar word for *consort* in ver. 9 is employed for Persian queens (Neh. ii. 6), and also because the Tyrians were tributary to Persia, and because the sons of the king are to be "called princes in all lands," which reminds us of Persian satraps. Ewald finally fixed on Jeroboam II. of Israel. Cheyne ("Orig. of Psalt.") finds the king of the psalm in Ptolemy Philadelphus, the inspirer, as was believed, of the LXX. translation, whom Josephus and Philo extol. Its author puts this identification only as "tentative." Notwithstanding his anticipatory protest against making Philadelphus' moral character an objection, he feels that it is an objection; for he urges that its darker shades had not yet disclosed themselves, and confesses that "a haze of illusion encompassed our poet," who "overrated this Ptolemy, from taking too external a view of the Messianic promise, and being flattered by a Hellenic king's partiality for his people" (*u.s.*, 172). Philadelphus afterwards married his sister. His hands were red with blood. Was a Jewish psalmist likely to take "up the singing robes of a court poet" (*u.s.*) in honour of a Ptolemy, or to transfer the promises to the Davidic line to, and to speak of God as the God of, a foreign king? Or how, if he did, came his song to find and keep a place in the Psalter? All these conjectures show the hopelessness of identifying the person intended addressed in the psalm. It is said that a knowledge of the historical allusions in the

Psalter is indispensable to enjoying it. They would often be helpful if they could be settled, but that is no reason for elevating conjecture to the place of knowledge.

One reason for the failure of attempts at identification is that the language is a world too wide for the best and greatest of Jewish kings. Much in the psalm applies to a historical occasion, the marriage of some monarch; but there is much that as obviously goes beyond it. Either, then, the psalm is hyperbole, outstripping even poetical licence, or there appear in it characteristics of the ideal monarch whom the psalmist knew to be promised to Israel. Every king of Judah by descent and office was a living prophecy. The singer sees the Messiah shining, as it were, through the shadowy form of the earthly king, whose limitations and defects, no less than his excellences and glories, pointed onwards to a greater than Solomon, in whom the "sure mercies" promised to David should be facts at last.

The psalm has two main divisions, prefaced by a prelude (ver. 1), and followed by prediction of happy issue of the marriage and enduring and wide dominion. The two main parts are respectively addressed to the royal bridegroom (vv. 2–9) and to the bride (vv. 10–15).

The singer lays claim to at least *poetic* inspiration. His heart is seething or boiling over with goodly words, or perhaps with the joyful matter which occasions his song—namely, the royal nuptials. He dedicates his "work" (like the original meaning of "poem"—a thing made) to "a king," the absence of the definite article suggesting that the office is more prominent than the person. He sings to a king; therefore his strains must be lofty. So full is his heart that the swift words pour out as the stylus of a rapid

writer races over the parchment. The previous musing has been long, the fire has burned slowly; but at last all is molten, and rushes out, fluent because fervent.

The picture of the king begins with two features on which the old-world ideal of a monarch laid stress—personal beauty and gracious speech. This monarch is fairer than the sons of men. The note of superhuman excellence is struck at the outset; and though the surface reference is only to physical beauty, that is conceived of as the indication of a fair nature which moulds the fair form.

> "For of the soul the body form doth take;
> For soul is form, and doth the body make."

The highest truth of this opening word is realised only in Him of whom it was also said, in apparent contradiction, but real harmony with it, "His visage was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men." The craving for "whatsoever things are lovely," like all other desires, has for its object Jesus Christ. Another kingly excellence is sweet courtesy of speech. Possibly, indeed, the "grace poured on the lips" may mean the gracious smile which moulds their curves, but more likely it refers to the kindly speech that so well become a mouth that can command. The sweetest examples of such words are poor beside "the gracious words that proceeded out of His mouth." The psalmist's ideal is that of a gentle king. Where else than in the King whose sceptre was a reed, not an iron rod, has it been fulfilled?

> "Nor know we anything more fair
> Than is the smile upon Thy face."

From such characteristics the psalmist draws an inference—"therefore God hath blessed thee for ever";

for that "therefore" does not introduce the result of the preceding excellences, but the cause of them. The psalmist knows that God has blessed the king because he sees these beauties. They are the visible signs and tokens of the Divine benediction. In its reference to Christ, the thought expressed is that His superhuman beauty is to all men the proof of a unique operation of God. Abiding divinity is witnessed by perfect humanity.

The scene changes with startling suddenness to the fury of battle. In a burst of lyric enthusiasm, forgetting for a moment nuptials and wedding marches, the singer calls on the king to array himself for war and to rush on the foe. Very striking is this combination of gentleness and warrior strength—a union which has been often realised in heroic figures, which is needful for the highest type of either, and which is fulfilled in the Lamb of God, who is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. The king is to gird on his sword, and to array himself, as in glittering armour, in his splendour and majesty, and, thus arrayed, to mount his chariot, or, less probably, to bestride his war-horse, and hurl himself on the yielding ranks of the enemy. "Press forward, drive (or *ride*) on," crushing obstacles and forcing a path. But Israel's king could be no vulgar conqueror, impelled by lust of dominion or "glory." His sword is to be girt on for the help or "on behalf of truth, meekness, and righteousness." These abstracts may be used for concretes—namely, the possessors of the qualities named. But the limitation is not necessary. The monarch's warfare is for the spread of these. The Hebrew binds the two latter closely together by an anomalous construction, which may be represented by connecting the two words with a hyphen. They are

regarded as a double star. Then follows a verse of hurry: "Thy right hand shall teach thee awe-striking deeds." He has no allies. The canvas has no room for soldiers. The picture is like the Assyrian sculptures, in which the king stands erect and alone in his chariot, a giant in comparison with the tiny figures beneath him. Like Rameses in Pentaur's great battle-song, "he pierced the line of the foe; . . . he was all alone, no other with him." Then follow three abrupt clauses, reflecting in their fragmentary character the stress of battle: "Thine arrows are sharp—The peoples fall under thee—In the heart of the enemies of the king." The bright arrow is on the string; it whizzes; the plain is strewed with prostrate forms, the king's shaft in the heart of each. It is no mere fanciful spiritualising which sees in this picture an adumbration of the merciful warfare of Christ all through the ages. We get to the kernel of the history of Israel when we regard it as the preparation for Christ. We understand the *raison d'être* of its monarchy when we see in these poor shadows the types of the King of men, who was to be all that they should have been and were not. The world-wide conflict for truth and meekness and righteousness is His conflict, and the help which is done on earth He doeth it all Himself. The psalm waits for its completion still, and will wait until the day when the marriage supper of the Lamb is preceded by the last battle and crowning victory of Him who "in righteousness doth judge and make war."

All the older versions take "God," in ver. 6 *a*, as a vocative, while most moderns seek another construction or text. "The sum of the matter is that the only natural rendering of the received text is that of the Versions, 'Thy throne, O God'" (Cheyne, *in loc.*).

Three renderings have been proposed, all of which are harsh. "Thy throne is the throne of God," etc., is Ewald's suggestion, revived from a Jewish expositor, and adopted widely by many recent commentators, and in the margin of the R.V. It is clumsy, and leaves it doubtful whether the stress of the assertion lies on the Divine appointment or on the eternal duration of the throne. "Thy God's throne is," etc., is very questionable grammatically, and extremely harsh. The only other suggested rendering, "Thy throne is God," etc., may fairly be pronounced impossible. If the vocative construction is retained, are we shut up to Cheyne's further opinion, that "the only natural interpretation [is] that of the Targum, 'Thy throne, O Jehovah'"? If so, we shall be obliged to admit textual corruption; for a reference to the eternal duration of Jehovah's dominion is quite out of place here, where the parallelism of the next clause demands some characteristic of the king's throne corresponding to that of his sceptre, there stated. But in Exod. xxi. 6, xxii. 8, and Psalm lxxxii. 6, the name God (Elohim) is applied to rulers and judges, on the ground, as our Lord puts it, in John x. 35, that "unto them the word of God came"—*i.e.*, that they were theocratic officers. The designation, therefore, of the king as Elohim is not contrary to the Hebrew line of thought. It does not predicate divinity, but Divine preparation for and appointment to office. The recurrence of Elohim (God) in its full Divine signification in the next verse is felt by many to be an insuperable objection to recognising the lower sense here. But the emphatic "thy God," which is appended to the name in ver. 7, seems expressly intended to distinguish between the uses of the word in the two verses. August, then, as the title is, it proves nothing

as to the divinity of the person addressed. We recognise the prophetic character of the psalm, and strongly believe that it points onwards to Christ the King. But we cannot take the ascription of the title "O God" as having reference to His Divine nature. Such a thought lay far beyond the prophetic horizon. The Old Testament usage, which is appealed to in order to justify the translation of the word "God" as a vocative, must govern its meaning. The careful distinction drawn by the expressions of ver. 7, between the lower and higher senses of the name, forbid the attempt to find here a premature and anomalous statement of deep truth, for which the ages were not ripe. While we, who know the full truth, may permissibly apply the psalmist's words as its expression, we must not forget that in so doing we are going beyond their real meaning. The controversies waged over the construction of this verse have sometimes been embittered by the supposition that it was a buttress for the truth of Christ's Divine nature. But that is a mistake. The psalm goes no further than to declare that the king is divinely endowed and appointed. It does outline a character fairer than the sons of men, which requires indwelling Deity for its realisation in humanity. But it does not speak the decisive word, which alone could solve the mystery of its requirement, by proclaiming the fact of incarnation.

The perpetuity of the king's throne is guaranteed, not only by his theocratic appointment by God, but by the righteousness of his rule. His sceptre is not a rod of iron, but "a sceptre of uprightness." He is righteous in character as well as in official acts. He "loves righteousness," and therefore cannot but "hate iniquity." His broad shield shelters all who love and

seek after righteousness, and he wars against evil wherever it shows itself. Therefore his throne stands firm, and is the world's hope. A singer who had grasped the truth that power divorced from justice could not endure was far in advance of his time. The nations have not yet learned his lesson. The vast robber-kingdoms which seemed to give the lie to his faith have confirmed it by their evanescence.

The king's love of righteousness leads to his being "anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows." This anointing is not that of a coronation, but that of a feast. His "fellows" may either be other kings or his attendant companions at his marriage. The psalmist looks as deep into individual life as he has just done into politics, and ascribes to righteousness lofty powers in that region too. The heart which loves it will be joyful, whatever befalls. Conformity to the highest ideal known to a man, or, at all events, hearty love thereof, leading to efforts after it, is the surest foundation for lasting and deep joy. Since Christ is the fulfilment of the psalmist's picture, and perfectly realised the perfection of manhood, the psalmist's words here are most fully applicable to Him.

True, He was "a man of sorrows," but beneath His sorrow had abiding and central joy, which He bequeathed to us, with the assurance that to possess it would make our joy full. His pure manhood was ever in touch with God, and lived in conscious righteousness, and therefore there was ever light within, though there was darkness around. He, the saddest, was likewise the gladdest of men, and "anointed with the oil of joy above His fellows."

In ver. 8 the psalm reaches its main theme—the

marriage of the king. The previous verses have painted his grace of person, his heroic deeds in battle, and his righteous rule. Now he stands ready to pass into the palace to meet his bride. His festival robes are so redolent of perfumes that they seem to be composed of nothing but woven fragrance. There are difficulties in the rendering of ver. 8 *a*, but that adopted above is generally accepted as the most probable. The clause then describes the burst of jubilant music which welcomed and rejoiced the king as he approached the "palaces of ivory," where his bride waited his coming.

Ver. 9 carries the king into his harem. The inferior wives are of royal blood, but nearest him and superior to these is the queen-consort glittering with golden ornaments. This feature of the psalmist's description can only have reference to the actual historical occasion of the psalm, and warns against overlooking that in seeking a prophetic reference to the Christ in every particular.

The second half of the psalm is an address to the bride and a description of her beauty and state. The singer assumes a fatherly tone, speaking to her as "daughter." She is a foreigner by birth, and is called upon to give up all her former associations, with whole-hearted consecration to her new duties. It is difficult to imagine Jezebel or Athaliah as the recipient of these counsels, nor does it seem to the present writer to add anything to the enjoyment of the psalm that the person to whom they were addressed should be identified. The exhortation to give up all for love's sake goes to the heart of the sacred relation of husband and wife, and witnesses to the lofty ideal of that relation which prevailed in Israel, even though

polygamy was not forbidden. The sweet necessity of wedded love subordinates all other love, as a deeper well, when sunk, draws the surface waters and shallower springs into itself.

> "The rich, golden shaft
> Hath killed the flock of all affections else
> That live in her."

The king sung of in the psalm was a type of Christ. Every true marriage is in the same fashion a type of the union of the soul with Jesus, the lover of all, the bridegroom of humanity. So it is not arbitrary spiritualising, but recognition of the nobleness of the lower love and of its essential similarity with the highest, when the counsel to this bride is regarded as shadowing the duties of the soul wedded to Christ. If a heart is really influenced by love to Him, that love will make self-surrender blessed. A child gladly drops toys when it stretches out its little hand for better gifts. If we are joined to Jesus, we shall not be unwilling to "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge" of Him. Have the terms of wedded life changed since this psalm was written? Have the terms of Christian living altered since it was said, "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple"? The law still remains, "Daughter, forget thine own people and Thy father's house." The exhortation is followed by a promise: "So shall the king desire thy beauty." The application of these words to the relations of Christ and His people carries with it a striking thought that He is affected by the completeness of our self-surrender and dependence. He pours love on the unworthy, but that is a different

thing from the love with which He responds to such abandonment of self and other loves. Holy, noble living will bring a smile into His face and draw Him nearer to us.

But whilst there is all this sweet commerce of love and giving, the bride is reminded that the king is her lord, and is to be reverenced as well as loved. There is here, no doubt, the influence of an archaic mode of regarding marriage and the wife's position. But it still is true that no woman finds all that her heart needs in her husband, unless she can bring her reverence where she has brought her love; and that love will not long remain if reverence departs. Nor is the warning less needed in the higher region of the wedlock of the soul with the Saviour. Some types of emotional religion have more to say about love than about obedience. They are full of half-wholesome apostrophes to a "dear Lord," and are apt to forget the last word in the emphasis which they put on the first. The beggar-maid married to a king was full of reverence as well as love; and the souls whom Jesus stoops to love and wash and wed are never to forget to blend adoration with approach and obedience with love.

A picture of the reflected honour and influence of the bride follows in ver. 12. When she stands by the king's side, those around recognise her dignity, and seek to secure her favour. Hupfeld, Hitzig, and others take "daughter of Tyre" to be a vocative, addressed to the bride, who is, according to their view, a Tyrian princess. But there is a strong grammatical objection to that construction in the copula ("and") prefixed to "daughter," which is never so prefixed to a vocative unless preceded by another vocative. Delitzsch, Baethgen, Perowne, and Cheyne agree in recognising the

force of that consideration, and the three former regard the phrase not as a vocative, but as a nominative. It is a personification of the Tyrians according to a familiar idiom. The clause is elliptical, and has to be supplemented by supposing that the same verb, which appears in the next clause in the plural, is to be supplied in thought, just as that clause requires the supplement of "with a gift" from this one. There appears to be some flaw in the text, as the clauses are unsymmetrical, and possibly the punctuators have marked a hiatus by the sign (Pasek) after the word "daughter of Tyre." To "seek thy favour" is literally to "smooth thy face"—a graphic representation. In the highest region, which we regard the psalm as adumbrating, the words have fulfilment. The bride standing by her bridegroom, and showing her love and devotion by self-abandonment and reverence, will be glorious in the eyes of those around. They who manifestly live in loving communion with their Lord will be recognised for what they are, and, though sometimes hated therefor, will also be honoured. When the Church has cast all but Christ out of its heart, it will conquer the world. "The sons of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee."

In vv. 13–15 the bride's apparel and nuptial procession are described. She is "all glorious within,"—by which is not meant, as ordinarily supposed, that she possesses an inner beauty of soul, but that the poet conceives of her as standing in the inner chamber, where she has been arrayed in her splendour. Krochmal, followed by Graetz and Cheyne, changes the text so as to read *corals*, or, as Cheyne renders, *pearls* (Heb. *p'ninim*), for *within* (*p'ninah*), and thus preserves unity of subject in the verse by removing the local designa-

tion. But the existing reading is intelligible. In ver. 14 the marriage procession is described. The words rendered "embroidered robes" are by some taken to mean "tapestry of divers colours" (Perowne), or richly woven carpets spread for the bride to walk on, and by others (Hitzig, Riehm) gay-coloured cushions, to which she is led in order to sit beside the bridegroom. But the word means apparel elsewhere, and either of the other meanings introduces an irrelevant detail of another kind into the picture. The analogy of other Scripture metaphors leads at once to interpreting the bride's attire as symbolic of the purity of character belonging to the Church. The Apocalypse dresses "the Lamb's wife" in "fine linen, clean and white." The psalm arrays her in garments gleaming with gold, which symbolise splendour and glory, and in embroidered robes, which suggest the patient use of the slow needle, and the variegated harmony of colour attained at last. There is no marriage between Christ and the soul, unless it is robed in the beauty of righteousness and manifold graces of character. In other places we read that the bride "made *herself* ready," and also that "to her was *granted* that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white," in which sayings are set forth the double sources of such a garment of the soul. It is a gift from above. It is "put on" by continual effort, based on faith. The picture of the home-coming of the bride follows. She is attended by her maidens, and with them she passes into the palace amid joys and exultation. The psalm stops at the threshold. It is not for the singer to draw back the curtains and let in the day. "The door was shut." The presence of virgin companions waiting on the bride no more interferes with the application of the psalm to Christ and

His Church than the similar representation brings confusion into our Lord's parable of the Ten Virgins. Parables and symbols are elastic, and often duplicate their representations of the same thing; and such is the case here.

The closing verses are addressed, not to the bride, but to the king, and can only in a very modified way and partially be supposed to pass beyond the Jewish monarch and refer to the true King. Hopes that he might be blessed with fortunate issue of the marriage were quite in place in an epithalamion, and the delicacy of the light touch with which this closing note is struck is noteworthy, especially in contrast with the tone of many famous secular songs of similar import. But much straining is needed to extract a spiritual sense from the words. Perowne truly says that it is "wiser to acknowledge at once the mixed character" of the psalm, and he quotes a sagacious saying of Calvin's to the effect that it is not necessary that every detail should be carefully fitted to Christ. The psalm had a historical basis; and it has also a prophetic meaning, because the king of Israel was himself a type, and Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of the ideal never realised by its successive occupants. Both views of its nature must be kept in view in its interpretation; and it need cause no surprise if, at some points, the rind of prose fact is, so to speak, thicker than at others, or if certain features absolutely refuse to lend themselves to the spiritual interpretation.

PSALM XLVI.

1 God is a refuge and stronghold for us,
A help in troubles most readily to be found.
2 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth do change,
And the mountains reel into the heart of the sea.
3 Let its waters roar and foam;
Let mountains shake at its pride. Selah.
[Jehovah of hosts is with us;
A high tower for us is Jacob's God.]

4 [There is] a river—its branches make glad the city of God
The sanctuary of the tabernacles of the Most High.
5 God is in her midst; she shall not be moved:
God shall help her at the morning dawn.
6 Nations roared, kingdoms were moved:
He gave forth His voice, the earth melts.
7 Jehovah of hosts is with us;
A high tower for us is Jacob's God. Selah.

8 Come, behold the deeds of Jehovah,
Who has made desolations in the earth.
9 Quelling wars to the end of the earth:
The bow He breaks, and hews the spear in splinters;
The chariots He burns in the fire.
10 "Desist, and know that I am God:
I will be exalted in the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."
11 Jehovah of hosts is with us;
A high tower for us is Jacob's God. Selah.

THERE are two events, one or other of which probably supplies the historical basis of this and the two following psalms. One is Jehoshaphat's deliverance from the combined forces of the bordering nations (2 Chron. xx.). Delitzsch adopts this as the occasion of the psalm. But the other more usually

accepted reference to the destruction of Sennacherib's army is more probable. Psalms xlvi. and xlviii. have remarkable parallelisms with Isaiah. The noble contrast of the quiet river which makes glad the city of God with a tossing, earth-shaking sea resembles the prophet's threatening that the effect of refusing the "waters of Shiloah which go softly" would be inundation by the strong and mighty river, the Assyrian power. And the emblem is expanded in the striking language of Isa. xxxiii. 21: "The glorious Lord will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams; wherein shall go no galley with oars." Encircled by the flashing links of that broad moat, Jerusalem sits secure. Again, the central thought of the refrain in the psalm, "The Lord of hosts is with us," is closely allied to the symbolic name which Isaiah gave as a pledge of deliverance, "Immanuel, God with us."

The structure is simple. The three strophes into which the psalm falls set forth substantially the same thought, that God's presence is safety and peace, whatever storms may roar. This general theme is exhibited in the first strophe (vv. 1–3) in reference to natural convulsions; in the second (vv. 4–7) in reference to the rage of hostile kingdoms; and in the third (vv. 8–11) men are summoned to behold a recent example of God's delivering might, which establishes the truth of the preceding utterances and has occasioned the psalm. The grand refrain which closes the second and third strophes should probably be restored at the end of ver. 3.

In the first strophe the psalmist paints chaos come again, by the familiar figures of a changed earth, tottering mountains sinking in the raging sea from which they rose at creation, and a wild ocean with

thunderous dash appalling the ear and yeasty foam terrifying the eye, sweeping in triumphant insolence over all the fair earth. It is prosaic to insist on an allegorical meaning for the picture. It is rather a vivid sketch of utter confusion, dashed in with three or four bold strokes, an impossible case supposed in order to bring out the unshaken calm of those who have God for ark in such a deluge. He is not only a sure refuge and stronghold, but one easy of access when troubles come. There is little good in a fortress, however impregnable, if it is so difficult to reach that a fugitive might be slain a hundred times before he was safe in it. But this high tower, which no foe can scale, can be climbed at a thought, and a wish lifts us within its mighty walls. The psalmist speaks a deep truth, verified in the spiritual life of all ages, when he celebrates the refuge of the devout soul as "most readily to be found."

As the text stands, this strophe is a verse too short, and ver. 3 drags if connected with "will not we fear." The restoration of the refrain removes the anomaly in the length of the strophe, and enables us to detach ver. 3 from the preceding. Its sense is then completed, if we regard it as the protasis of a sentence of which the refrain is the apodosis, or if, with Cheyne and others, we take ver. 3, "Let its waters roar," etc.—what of that? "Jehovah of hosts is with us." If the strophe is thus completed, it conforms to the other two, in each of which may be traced a division into two pairs of verses. These two verse-pairs of the first strophe would then be inverted parallelism,—the former putting security in God first, and surrounding trouble second; the latter dealing with the same two subjects, but in reversed sequence.

The second strophe brings a new picture to view with impressive suddenness, which is even more vividly dramatic if the refrain is not supplied. Right against the vision of confusion comes one of peace. The abrupt introduction of "a river" as an isolated noun, which dislocates grammatical structure, is almost an exclamation. "There is a river" enfeebles the swing of the original. We might almost translate, "Lo! a river!" Jerusalem was unique among historical cities in that it had no great river. It had one tiny thread of water, of which perhaps the psalmist is thinking. But whether there is here the same contrast between Siloam's gentle flow and the surging waters of hostile powers as Isaiah sets forth in the passage already referred to (Isa. viii. 6), the meaning of this gladdening stream is the ever-flowing communication of God Himself in His grace. The stream is the fountain in flow. In the former strophe we hear the roar of the troubled waters, and see the firm hills toppling into their depths. Now we behold the gentle flow of the river, gliding through the city, with music in its ripples and sunshine in its flash and refreshment in its waters, parting into many arms and yet one in diversity, and bringing life and gladness wherever it comes. Not with noise nor tumult, but in silent communication, God's grace and peace refresh the soul. Power is loud, but Omnipotence is silent. The roar of all the billows is weak when compared with the quiet sliding onwards of that still stream. It has its divisions. As in old days each man's bit of garden was irrigated by a branch led from the stream, so in endless diversity, corresponding to the infinite greatness of the source and the innumerable variety of men's needs, God's grace comes. "All these worketh that one and

the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally." The streams gladden the city of God with the gladness of satisfied thirsts, with the gladness which comes from the contact of the human spirit with Divine completeness. So supplied, the city may laugh at besiegers. It has unfailing supplies within itself, and the enemy may cut off all surface streams, but its "water shall be sure."

Substantially the same thought is next stated in plain words: "God is in the midst of her." And therefore two things follow. One is unshaken stability, and another is help at the right time—"at the turn of the morning." "The Lord is in the midst of her"—that is a perennial fact. "The Lord shall help her"—that is the "grace for seasonable help." He, not we, determines when the night shall thin away its blackness into morning twilight. But we may be sure that the presence which is the pledge of stability and calm even in storm and darkness will flash into energy of help at the moment when He wills. The same expression is used to mark the time of His looking from the pillar of cloud and troubling the Egyptians, and there may be an allusion to that standing instance of His help here. "It is not for you to know the times and the seasons"; but this we may know—that the Lord of all times will always help at the right time; He will not come so quickly as to anticipate our consciousness of need, nor delay so long as to let us be irrevocably engulfed in the bog. "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. When He heard *therefore* that he was sick, He abode two days still in the same place where He was." Yet He came in time.

With what vigour the short, crashing clauses of ver. 6 describe the wrath and turbulence of the nations, and

the instantaneous dissolving of their strength into weakness at a word from those awful lips! The verse may be taken as hypothetical or as historical. In either case we see the sequence of events as by a succession of lightning flashes. The hurry of the style, marked by the omission of connecting particles, reflects the swiftness of incident, like *Veni, vidi, vici.* The utterance of God's will conquers all. At the sound of that voice stillness and a pause of dread fall on the "roar" (same word as in ver. 3) of the nations, like the hush in the woods when thunder rolls. He speaks, and all meaner sounds cease. "The lion hath roared, who shall not fear?" No material vehicle is needed. To every believer in God there is an incomprehensible action of the Divine Will on material things; and no explanations bridge the gulf recognised in the psalmist's broken utterances, which declare sequence and not mode of operation: "He uttered His voice, the earth melted."

Again the triumph of the refrain peals forth, with its musical accompaniment prolonging the impression. In it the psalmist gives voice, for himself and his fellows, to their making their own of the general truths which the psalm has been declaring. The two names of God set forth a twofold ground for confidence. "Jehovah of hosts" is all the more emphatic here since the Second Book of the Psalter is usually Elohistic. It proclaims God's eternal, self-existent Being, and His covenant relation, as well as His absolute authority over the ranked forces of the universe, personal or impersonal, spiritual or material. The Lord of all these legions is with us. When we say "The God of Jacob," we reach back into the past and lay hold of the Helper of the men of old as ours. What He has been, He is; what He did, He is doing still. The river is full to-day,

though the van of the army did long ago drink and were satisfied. The bright waters are still as pellucid and abundant as then, and the last of the rear-guard will find them the same.

The third strophe summons to contemplate with fixed attention the "desolations" made by some great manifestation of God's delivering power. It is presupposed that these are still visible. Broken bows, splintered spears, half-charred chariots, strew the ground, and Israel can go forth without fear and feast their eyes on these tokens of what God has done for them. The language is naturally applied to the relics of Sennacherib's annihilated force. In any case it points to a recent act of God's, the glad surprise of which palpitates all through the psalm. The field of history is littered with broken, abandoned weapons, once flourished in hands long since turned to dust; and the city and throne of God against which they were lifted remain unharmed. The voice which melted the earth speaks at the close of the psalm; not now with destructive energy, but in warning, through which tones of tenderness can be caught. God desires that foes would cease their vain strife before it proves fatal. "Desist" is here an elliptical expression, of which the full form is "Let your hands drop"; or, as we say, "Ground your weapons," and learn how vain is a contest with Him who is God, and whose fixed purpose is that all nations shall know and exalt Him. The prospect hinted at in the last words, of a world submissive to its King, softens the terrors of His destructive manifestations, reveals their inmost purpose, and opens to foes the possibility of passing, not as conquerors, but as subjects, and therefore fellow-citizens, through the gate into the city.

PSALM XLVII.

1 All ye peoples, clap [your] hands;
Shout to God with joyful cry.
2 For Jehovah is most High [and] dread,
A great King over all the earth.
3 He subdues peoples under us,
And nations under our feet,
4 He chooses for us our inheritance,
The pride of Jacob whom He loved. Selah.

5 God is gone up with a shout,
Jehovah with trumpet clang.
6 Sing with the harp to God, sing with the harp;
Sing with the harp to our King, sing with the harp.
7 For King of all the earth is God:
Sing with the harp a skilful song.
8 God has become King over the nations:
He has taken His seat on His holy throne.

9 The princes of the peoples gather themselves together
[As] a people of the God of Abraham:
For to God belong the shields of the earth;
Greatly has He exalted Himself.

THE closing thought of Psalm xlvi. is nobly expanded in this jubilant summons to all nations to praise Jehovah as their King. Both psalms have a similar, and probably the same, historical basis: a Divine act so recent that the tumult of triumph has not yet subsided, and the waves of joy still run high. Only in Psalm xlvi. the effect of that God-wrought deliverance is principally regarded as the security and peace of Israel, and in this psalm as the drawing of the nations

to obey Israel's King, and so to join the chorus of Israel's praise. While the psalm has many resemblances to the Songs of the King (Psalm xciii. *seqq.*), it is clearly in its right place here, as forming with the preceding and succeeding psalms a trilogy, occasioned by one great manifestation of God's care for the nation. No event is more appropriate than the usually accepted destruction of Sennacherib's army. The psalm has little of complexity in structure or thought. It is a gush of pure rapture. It rises to prophetic foresight, and, by reason of a comparatively small historical occasion, has a vision of the world-wide expansion of the kingdom of God. It falls into two strophes of four verses each, with one longer verse appended to the latter.

In the first strophe the nations are invited to welcome God as their King, not only because of His Divine exaltation and world-wide dominion, but also because of His deeds for "Jacob." The same Divine act which in Psalm xlvi. is represented as quelling wars and melting the earth, and in Psalm xlviii. as bringing dismay, pain, and flight, is here contemplated as attracting the nations to worship. The psalmist knows that destructive providences have their gracious aspect, and that God's true victory over men is not won when opposition is crushed and hearts made to quake, but when recognition of His sway and joy in it swell the heart. The quick clatter of clapping hands in sign of homage to the King (2 Kings xi. 12) blends with the shrill cries with which Easterns express joy, in "a tumult of acclaim." Hupfeld thinks that to suppose the heathen called upon to do homage because of the victory for Israel won over them is entirely mistaken. But unless that victory is the reason for the summons,

the psalm offers none; and it is surely not difficult to suppose that the exhibition of God's power leads to reflection which issues in recognition of His sovereignty. Vv. 3, 4, seem to state the grounds for the summons in ver. 1. The tenses in these verses present a difficulty in the way of taking them for a historical retrospect of the conquest and partition of Canaan, which but for that objection would be the natural interpretation. It is possible to take them as "a truth of experience inferred from what had just been witnessed, the historical fact being expressed not in historical form, but generalised and idealised" (Delitzsch, *in loc.*). The just accomplished deliverance repeated in essence the wonders of the first entrance on possession of the land, and revealed the continuous working of the same Divine hand, ever renewing the choice of Jacob's inheritance, and ever scattering its enemies. "The pride of Jacob" is a phrase in apposition with "our inheritance." The Holy Land was the object of "pride" to "Jacob," not in an evil sense but in that he boasted of it as a precious treasure intrusted to him by God. The root fact of all God's ancient and continued blessings is that He "loved." His own heart, not Jacob's deserts, prompted His mercies.

The second strophe is distinguished from the first by the increased fervour of its calls to praise, by its still more exultant rush, and by its omission of reference to Jacob. It is wholly concerned with the peoples whom it invites to take up the song. As in the former strophe the singer showed to the peoples God working in the world, here he bids them look up and see Him ascending on high. "Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first?" The mighty deliverance of which the triumph throbs through this

trilogy of pæans of victory was God's coming down. Now He has gone back to His throne and seated Himself thereon, not as having ceased to work in the world—for He is still King over it all—but as having completed a delivering work. He does not withdraw when He goes up. He does not cease to work here below when He sits throned in His palace-temple above. The "shout" and "voice of a trumpet," which accompany that ascent, are borrowed from the ordinary attendants on a triumphal procession. He soars as in a chariot of praises,—from whose lips the psalm does not say, but probably it intends Israel to be understood as the singer. To that choir the nations are called to join their voices and harps, since God is their King too, and not Jacob's only. The word rendered in the A.V. and R.V. (text) "with understanding" is a noun, the name of a description of psalm, which occurs in several psalm titles, and is best understood as "a skilful song." Ver. 8 gathers up the reasons for the peoples' homage to God. He has "become King" over them by His recent act, having manifested and established His dominion; and He has now "sat down on His throne," as having accomplished His purpose, and as thence administering the world's affairs.

A final verse, of double the length of the others, stands somewhat apart from the preceding strophe both in rhythm and in thought. It crowns the whole. The invitations to the nations are conceived of as having been welcomed and obeyed. And there rises before the poet's eye a fair picture of a great convocation, such as might wait before a world-ruling monarch's throne on the day of his coronation. The princes of the nations, like tributary kings, come flocking to do homage, "as if they surely knew their sovereign Lord was by."

The obliteration of distinction between Israel and the nations, by the incorporation of the latter, so that "the peoples" become part of the "people of the God of Abraham," floats before the singer's prophetic eye, as the end of God's great manifestation of Himself. The two parts of that double choir, which the preceding strophes summon to song, coalesce at last, and in grand unison send up one full-throated, universal melodious shout of praise. "The shields of the earth" are best understood as a figurative expression for the princes just spoken of, who now at last recognise to whom they belong. Thus God has exalted Himself by His deeds; and the result of these deeds is that He is greatly exalted by the praise of a world, in which Israel and the "peoples" dwell as one beneath His sceptre and celebrate His name.

The psalmist looked far ahead. His immediate experience was as "a little window through which he saw great matters." The prophecy of the universal spread of God's kingdom and the inclusion in it of the Gentiles is Messianic; and whether the singer knew that he spoke of a fair hope which should not be a fact for weary centuries, or anticipated wider and permanent results from that triumph which inspired his song, he spake of the Christ, and his strains are true prophecies of His dominion. There is no intentional reference in the psalm to the Ascension; but the thoughts underlying its picture of God's going up with a shout are the same which that Ascension sets forth as facts,—the merciful coming down into humanity of the Divine Helper; the completeness of His victory as attested by His return thither where He was before; His session in heaven, not as idle nor wearied, but as having done what He meant to do; His continuous working as King

in the world; and the widening recognition of His authority by loving hearts. The psalmist summons us all to swell with our voices that great chorus of praise which, like a sea, rolls and breaks in music round His royal seat.

PSALM XLVIII.

1 Great is Jehovah, and much to be praised,
In the city of our God, His holy mountain.
2 Lovely in loftiness, a joy of all the earth,
Is Mount Zion, the recesses of the north, the city of the great King.

3 God in her palaces
Has made Himself known as a high tower.
4 For, lo, the kings assembled themselves,
They marched onwards together.
5 They saw, then they were amazed;
They were terror-struck, they fled.
6 Trembling seized them there;
Pain, as [of] a woman in travail.
7 With an east wind
Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish.
8 According as we have heard, so have we seen
In the city of Jehovah of hosts, in the city of our God:
God will establish her for ever. Selah.

9 We have thought, O God, of Thy loving-kindness
In the midst of Thy Temple.
10 According to Thy name, O God,
So is Thy praise to the ends of the earth:
Thy right hand is full of righteousness.
11 Let Mount Zion rejoice,
Let the daughters of Judah exult,
Because of Thy judgments.
12 Compass Zion, and walk round her:
Reckon her towers.

13 Give heed to her bulwark,
Pass through her palaces;
That ye may tell it to the generation after.
14 That such is God, our God:
For ever and aye He will guide us.
Al-Muth.

THE situation seems the same as in Psalm xlvi., with which this psalm has many points of contact. In both we have the same triumph, the same proud affection for the holy city and sanctuary, the same confidence in God's dwelling there, the same vivid picturing of the mustering of enemies and their rapid dispersion, the same swift movement of style in describing that overthrow, the same thought of the diffusion of God's praise in the world as its consequence, the same closing summons to look upon the tokens of deliverance, with the difference that, in the former psalm, these are the shattered weapons of the defeated foe, and in this the unharmed battlements and palaces of the delivered city. The emphatic word of the refrain in Psalm xlvi. also reappears here in ver. 3. The psalm falls into three parts, of which the first (vv. 1, 2) is introductory, celebrating the glory of Zion as the city of God; the second (vv. 3–8) recounts in glowing words the deliverance of Zion; and the third tells of the consequent praise and trust of the inhabitants of Zion (vv. 9–14).

The general sense of the first part is plain, but ver. 2 is difficult. "Mount Zion" is obviously subject, and "lovely in loftiness" and "joy of all the earth" predicates; but the grammatical connection of the two last clauses is obscure. Further, the meaning of "the sides of the north" has not been satisfactorily ascertained. The supposition that there is an allusion in

the phrase to the mythological mountain of the gods, with which Zion is compared, is surely most unnatural. Would a Hebrew psalmist be likely to introduce such a parallel, even in order to assert the superiority of Zion? Nor is the grammatical objection to the supposition less serious. It requires a good deal of stretching and inserting to twist the two words "the sides of the north" into a comparison. It is more probable that the clause is topographical, describing some part of the city, but what part is far from clear. The accents make all the verse after "earth" the subject of the two preceding predicates, and place a minor division at "north," implying that "the sides of the north" is more closely connected with "Mount Zion" than with the "city of the great King," or than that last clause is.

Following these indications, Stier renders "Mount Zion [and] the northern side (*i.e.*, the lower city, on the north of Zion), which together make the city," etc. Others see here "the Holy City regarded from three points of view"—viz., "the Mount Zion" (the city of David), "the sides of the north" (Mount Moriah and the Temple), "the city of the great King" (Jerusalem proper). So Perowne and others. Delitzsch takes Zion to be the Temple hill, and "the sides of the north" to be in apposition. "The Temple hill, or Zion, in the narrower sense, actually formed the north-eastern corner of ancient Jerusalem," says he, and thus regards the subject of the whole sentence as really twofold, not threefold, as appears at first—Zion on the north, which is the palace-temple, and Jerusalem at its feet, which is "the city of the great King." But it must be admitted that no interpretation runs quite smoothly, though the summary ejection of the troublesome words "the sides of the north" from the text is too violent a remedy.

But the main thought of this first part is independent of such minute difficulties. It is that the one thing which made Zion-Jerusalem glorious was God's presence in it. It was beautiful in its elevation; it was safely isolated from invaders by precipitous ravines, inclosing the angle of the plateau on which it stood. But it was because God dwelt there and manifested Himself there that it was "a joy for all the earth." The name by which even the earthly Zion is called is "Jehovah-Shammah, The Lord is there." We are not forcing New Testament ideas into Old Testament words when we see in the psalm an eternal truth. An idea is one thing; the fact which more or less perfectly embodies it is another. The idea of God's dwelling with men had its less perfect embodiment in the presence of the Shechinah in the Temple, its more perfect in the dwelling of God in the Church, and will have its complete when the city "having the glory of God" shall appear, and He will dwell with men and be their God. God in her, not anything of her own, makes Zion lovely and gladdening. "Thy beauty was perfect through My comeliness which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord."

The second part pictures Zion's deliverance with picturesque vigour (vv. 3–8). Ver. 3 sums up the whole as the act of God, by which He has made Himself known as that which the refrain of Psalm xlvi. declared Him to be—a refuge, or, literally, a high tower. Then follows the muster of the hosts. "The kings were assembled." That phrase need not be called exaggeration, nor throw doubt on the reference to Sennacherib's army, if we remember the policy of Eastern conquerors in raising their armies from their conquests, and the boast which Isaiah puts into the

mouth of the Assyrian: "Are not my princes altogether kings?" They advance against the city. "They saw," —no need to say what. Immediately they "were amazed." The sight of the city broke on them from some hill-crest on their march. Basilisk-like, its beauty was paralysing, and shot a nameless awe into their hearts. "They were terror-struck; they fled." As in Psalm xlvi. 6, the clauses, piled up without cement of connecting particles, convey an impression of hurry, culminating in the rush of panic-struck fugitives. As has been often noticed, they recall Cæsar's *Veni, vidi, vici*; but these kings came, saw, *were* conquered. No cause for the rout is named. No weapons were drawn in the city. An unseen hand "smites once, and smites no more"; for once is enough. The process of deliverance is not told; for a hymn of victory is not a chronicle. One image explains it all, and signalises the Divine breath as the sole agent. "Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east wind" is not history, but metaphor. The unwieldy, huge vessel, however strong for fight, is unfit for storms, and, caught in a gale, rolls heavily in the trough of the sea, and is driven on a lee shore and ground to pieces on its rocks. "God blew upon them, and they were scattered," as the medal struck on the defeat of the Armada had it. In the companion psalm God's uttered voice did all. Here the breath of the tempest, which is the breath of His lips, is the sole agent.

The past, of which the nation had heard from its fathers, lives again in their own history; and that verification of traditional belief by experience is to a devout soul the chief blessing of its deliverances. There is rapture in the thought that "As we have heard, so have we seen." The present ever seems

commonplace. The sky is farthest from earth right overhead, but touches the ground on the horizon behind and before. Miracles were in the past; God will be manifestly in the far-off future, but the present is apt to seem empty of Him. But if we rightly mark His dealings with us, we shall learn that nothing in His past has so passed that it is not present. As the companion psalm says, "The God of Jacob is *our* refuge," this exclaims, "As we have heard, so have we seen."

But not only does the deliverance link the present with the past, but it flings a steady light into the future. "God shall establish her for ever." The city is truly "the eternal city," because God dwells in it. The psalmist was thinking of the duration of the actual Jerusalem, the imperfect embodiment of a great idea. But whatever may be its fate, the heart of his confidence is no false vision; for God's city will outlast the world. Like the "maiden fortresses," of which there is one in almost every land, fondly believed never to have been taken by enemies, that city is inexpugnable, and the confident answer to every threatening assailant is, "The virgin, the daughter of Zion, hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee." "God will establish her for ever." The pledges of that stability are the deliverances of the past and present.

The third part (vv. 9–14) deals with the praise and trust of the inhabitants of Zion. Deliverance leads to thankful meditation on the loving-kindness which it so signally displayed, and the ransomed people first gather in the Temple, which was the scene of God's manifestation of His grace, and therefore is the fitting place for them to ponder it. The world-wide consequences of the

great act of loving-kindness almost shut out of sight for the moment its bearing on the worshippers. It is a lofty height to which the song climbs, when it regards national deliverance chiefly as an occasion for wider diffusion of God's praise. His "name" is the manifestation of His character in act. The psalmist is sure that wherever that character is declared praise will follow, because he is sure that that character is perfectly and purely good, and that God cannot act but in such a way as to magnify Himself. That great sea will cast up nothing but pearls. The words carry also a lesson for recipients of Divine loving-kindness, teaching them that they misapprehend the purpose of their blessings, if they confine these to their own well-being and lose sight of the higher object—that men may learn to know and love Him. But the deliverance not only produces grateful meditation and widespread praise; it sets the mother city and her daughter villages astir, like Miriam and her maidens, with timbrel and dance, and ringing songs which celebrate "Thy judgments," terrible as they were. That dead host was an awful sight, and hymns of praise seem heartless for its dirge. But it is not savage glee nor fierce hatred which underlies the psalmist's summons, and still less is it selfish joy. "Thy judgments" are to be hymned when they smite some giant evil; and when systems and their upholders that array themselves against God are drowned in some Red Sea, it is fitting that on its banks should echo, "Sing ye to Jehovah, for He hath triumphed gloriously."

The close of this part may be slightly separated from vv. 9–11. The citizens who have been cooped up by the siege are bidden to come forth, and, free from fear, to compass the city without, and pass between its palaces within, and so see how untouched they are.

The towers and bulwark or rampart remain unharmed, with not a stone smitten from its place. Within, the palaces stand without a trace of damage to their beauty. Whatever perishes in any assaults, that which is of God will abide; and, after all musterings of the enemy, the uncaptured walls will rise in undiminished strength, and the fair palaces which they guard glitter in untarnished splendour. And this complete exemption from harm is to be told to the generation following, that they may learn what a God this God is, and how safely and well He will guide all generations.

The last word in the Hebrew text, which the A.V. and R.V. render "even unto death," can scarcely have that meaning. Many attempts have been made to find a signification appropriate to the close of such a triumphal hymn as this, but the simplest and most probable course is to regard the words as a musical note, which is either attached abnormally to the close of the psalm, or has strayed hither from the superscription of Psalm xlix. It is found in the superscription of Psalm ix. ("Al-Muth") as a musical direction, and has in all likelihood the same meaning here. If it is removed, the psalm ends abruptly, but a slight transposition of words and change of the main division of the verse remove that difficulty by bringing "for ever and aye" from the first half. The change improves both halves, laying the stress of the first exclusively on the thought that this God is such a God (or, by another rendering, "is here," *i.e.*, in the city), without bringing in reference to the eternity of His protection, and completing the second half worthily, with the thought of His eternal guidance of the people among whom He dwells.

PSALM XLIX.

1 Hear this, all ye peoples;
Give ear, all ye inhabitants of the world:
2 Both low-born and high-born,
Rich and poor together.
3 My mouth shall speak wisdom;
And the meditation of my heart shall utter understanding
4 I will bend my ear to a parable:
I will open my riddle on the harp.

5 Why should I fear in the days of evil,
When the malice of my pursuers surrounds me,
6 [Even of] those who rely on their riches,
And boast of their wealth?
7 No man can at all redeem a brother;
He cannot give to God a ransom for him
8 (Yea, too costly is the redemption price of their soul,
And he must leave it alone for ever):
9 That he may continue living on for ever,
And may not see the pit.
10 Nay, he must see that the wise die,
The fool and the brutish perish alike,
And leave to others their riches.
11 Their inward thought [is that] their houses [shall last] for ever,
Their dwellings to generation after generation;
They call their lands by their own names.
12 But man [being] in honour abides not:
He becomes like the beasts [that] are brought to silence.

13 This is the lot of them to whom presumptuous confidence belongs:
And after them men approve their sayings. Selah.
14 Like sheep they are folded in Sheol;
Death shepherds them:
And the upright shall rule over them in the morning;
And their form shall be wasted away by Sheol,
So that it is without a dwelling.

15 Surely God shall redeem my soul from the power of Sheol:
For He shall take me. Selah.
16 Fear not thou when a man becomes rich,
When the glory of his house increases:
17 For when he dies he will not take away any [of it];
His glory shall not go down after him.
18 Though in his lifetime he bless his soul
(And [men] praise thee when thou doest well for thyself)
19 He shall go to the generation of his fathers;
For evermore they see not light.
20 Man [who is] in honour, and has not understanding,
Becomes like the beasts that are brought to silence.

THIS psalm touches the high-water mark of Old Testament faith in a future life; and in that respect, as well as in its application of that faith to alleviate the mystery of present inequalities and non-correspondence of desert with condition, is closely related to the noble Psalm lxxiii., with which it has also several verbal identities. Both have the same problem before them—to construct a theodicy, or "to vindicate the ways of God to man"—and both solve it in the same fashion. Both appear to refer to the story of Enoch in their remarkable expression for ultimate reception into the Divine presence. But whether the psalms are contemporaneous cannot be determined from these data. Cheyne regards the treatment of the theme in Psalm lxxiii. as "more skilful," and therefore presumably later than Psalm xlix., which he would place "somewhat before the close of the Persian period." This date rests on the assumption that the amount of certitude as to a future life expressed in the psalm was not realised in Israel till after the exile.

After a solemn summons to all the world to hear the psalmist's utterance of what he has learned by Divine teaching (vv. 1–4), the psalm is divided into

two parts, each closed with a refrain. The former of these (vv. 5–12) contrasts the arrogant security of the prosperous godless with the end that awaits them; while the second (vv. 13–20) contrasts the dreary lot of these victims of vain self-confidence with the blessed reception after death into God's own presence which the psalmist grasped as a certainty for himself, and thereon bases an exhortation to possess souls in patience while the godless prosper, and to be sure that their lofty structures will topple into hideous ruin.

The psalmist's consciousness that he speaks by Divine inspiration, and that his message imports all men, is grandly expressed in his introductory summons. The very name which he gives to the world suggests the latter thought; for it means—the world considered as fleeting. Since we dwell in so transitory an abode, it becomes us to listen to the deep truths of the psalm. These have a message for high and low, for rich and poor. They are like a keen lancet to let out too great fulness of blood from the former, and to teach moderation, lowliness, and care for the Unseen. They are a calming draught for the latter, soothing when perplexed or harmed by "the proud man's contumely." But the psalmist calls for universal attention, not only because his lessons fit all classes, but because they are in themselves "wisdom," and because he himself had first bent his ear to receive them before he strung his lyre to utter them. The brother-psalmist, in Psalm lxxiii., presents himself as struggling with doubt and painfully groping his way to his conclusion. This psalmist presents himself as a divinely inspired teacher, who has received into purged and attentive ears, in many a whisper from God, and

as the result of many an hour of silent waiting, the word which he would now proclaim on the housetops. The discipline of the teacher of religious truth is the same at all times. There must be the bent ear before there is the message which men will recognise as important and true.

There is no parable in the ordinary sense in the psalm. The word seems to have acquired the wider meaning of a weighty didactic utterance, as in Psalm lxxviii. 2. The expression "Open my riddle" is ambiguous, and is by some understood to mean the proposal and by others the solution of the puzzle; but the phrase is more naturally understood of solving than of setting a riddle, and if so, the disproportion between the characters and fortunes of good and bad is the mystery or riddle, and the psalm is its solution.

The main theme of the first part is the certainty of death, which makes infinitely ludicrous the rich man's arrogance. It is one version of

> "There is no armour against Fate;
> Death lays his icy hand on kings."

Therefore how vain the boasting in wealth, when all its heaps cannot buy a day of life! This familiar thought is not all the psalmist's contribution to the solution of the mystery of life's unequal partition of worldly good; but it prepares the way for it, and it lays a foundation for his refusal to be afraid, however pressed by insolent enemies. Very significantly he sets the conclusion, to which observation of the transiency of human prosperity has led him, at the beginning of his "parable." In the parallel psalm (lxxiii.) the singer shows himself struggling from the depths of perplexity up to the sunny heights of faith. But here the poet begins with

the clear utterance of trustful courage, and then vindicates it by the thought of the impotence of wealth to avert death.

The hostility to himself of the self-confident rich boasters appears only for a moment at first. It is described by a gnarled, energetic phrase which has been diversely understood. But it seems clear that the "iniquity" (A.V. and R.V.) spoken of in ver. 5 *b* is not the psalmist's sin, for a reference here to his guilt or to retribution would be quite irrelevant; and if it were the consequences of his own evil that dogged him at his heels, he had every reason to fear, and confidence would be insolent defiance. But the word rendered in the A.V. *heels*, which is retained in the R.V. with a change in construction, may be a participial noun, derived from a verb meaning to trip up or supplant; and this gives a natural coherence to the whole verse, and connects it with the following one. "Pursuers" is a weak equivalent for the literal "those who would supplant me," but conveys the meaning, though in a somewhat enfeebled condition. Ver. 6 is a continuance of the description of the supplanters. They are "men of this world," the same type of man as excites stern disapproval in many psalms: as, for instance, in xvii. 14—a psalm which is closely related to this, both in its portrait of the godless and its lofty hope for the future. It is to be noted that they are not described as vicious or God-denying or defying. They are simply absorbed in the material, and believe that land and money are the real, solid goods. They are the same men as Jesus meant when He said that it was hard for those who trusted in riches to enter into the kingdom of heaven. It has been thought that the existence of such a class points to a late date for the

psalm; but the reliance on riches does not require large riches to rely on, and may flourish in full perniciousness in very primitive social conditions. A small elevation suffices to lift a man high enough above his fellows to make a weak head giddy. Those to whom material possessions are the only good have a natural enmity towards those who find their wealth in truth and goodness. The poet, the thinker, and, most of all, the religious man, are targets for more or less active "malice," or, at all events, are recognised as belonging to another class, and regarded as singular and "unpractical," if nothing worse. But the psalmist looks far enough ahead to see the end of all the boasting, and points to the great instance of the impotence of material good—its powerlessness to prolong life. It would be more natural to find in ver. 7 the statement that the rich man cannot prolong his own days than that he cannot do so for a "brother." A very slight change in the text would make the initial word of the verse ("brother") the particle of asseveration, which occurs in ver. 15 (the direct antithesis of this verse), and is characteristic of the parallel Psalm lxxiii. With that reading (Ewald, Cheyne, Baethgen, etc.) other slight difficulties are smoothed; but the present text is attested by the LXX. and other early versions, and is capable of defence. It may be necessary to observe that there is no reference here to any other "redemption" than that of the body from physical death. There is a distinct intention to contrast the man's limited power with God's, for ver. 15 points back to this verse, and declares that God can do what man cannot. Ver. 8 must be taken as a parenthesis, and the construction carried on from ver. 7 to ver. 9, which specifies the purpose of the ransom, if it were possible. No man can secure for

another continuous life or an escape from the necessity of seeing the pit—*i.e.*, going down to the depths of death. It would cost more than all the rich man's store; wherefore he—the would-be ransomer—must abandon the attempt for ever.

The "see" in ver. 10 is taken by many to have the same object as the "see" in ver. 9. "Yea, he shall see it." (So Hupfeld, Hitzig, Perowne, and others.) "The wise die" will then begin a new sentence. But the repetition is feeble, and breaks up the structure of ver. 10 undesirably. The fact stares the rich man in the face that no difference of position or of character affects the necessity of death. Down into that insatiable maw of Sheol ("the ever-asking"?) beauty, wisdom, wealth, folly, and animalism go alike, and it still gapes wide for fresh food. But a strange hallucination in the teeth of all experience is cherished in the "inward thought" of "the men of this world"—namely, that their houses shall continue for ever. Like the godless man in Psalm x., this rich man has reached a height of false security, which cannot be put into words without exposing its absurdity, but which yet haunts his inmost thoughts. The fond imagination of perpetuity is not driven out by the plain facts of life and death. He acts on the presumption of permanence; and he whose working hypothesis is that he is to abide always as his permanent home in his sumptuous palace, is rightly set down as believing in the incredible belief that the common lot will not be his. A man's real belief is that which moulds his life, though he has never formulated it in words. This "inward thought" either underlies the rich godless man's career, or that career is inexplicable. There is an emphatic contrast drawn between what he "sees" and what he, all the while, hugs in his

secret heart. That contrast is lost if the emendation found in the LXX. and adopted by many modern commentators is accepted, according to which, by the transposition of a letter, we get "their grave" instead of "their inward [thought]." A reference to the grave comes too early; and if the sense of ver. 11 *a* is that "their grave (or, the graves) are their houses for ever," there is no parallelism between ver. 11 *a* and *c*. The delusion of continuance is, on the other hand, naturally connected with the proud attempt to make their names immortal by impressing them on their estates. The language of ver. 11 *c* is somewhat ambiguous; but, on the whole, the rendering "they call their lands by their own names" accords best with the context.

Then comes with a crash the stern refrain which pulverises all this insanity of arrogance. The highest distinction among men gives no exemption from the grim law which holds all corporeal life in its gripe. The psalmist does not look, and probably did not see, beyond the external fact of death. He knows nothing of a future for the men whose portion is in this life. As we shall see in the second part of the psalm, the confidence in immortality is for him a deduction from the fact of communion with God here, and, apparently, his bent ear had received no whisper as to any distinction between the godless man and the beast in the regard to their deaths. They are alike "brought to silence." The awful dumbness of the dead strikes on his heart and imagination as most pathetic. "That skull had a tongue in it, and could sing once," and now the pale lips are locked in eternal silence, and some ears hunger in vain "for the sound of a voice that is still."

Hupfeld would transfer ver. 13, which begins the

second part, so that it should stand before the refrain, which would then have the Selah, that now comes in peculiarly at the end of ver. 13. But there is nothing unnatural in the first verse of the second part summing up the contents of the first part; and such a summary is needed in order to bring out the contrast between the godless folly and end of the rich men on the one hand, and the hope of the psalmist on the other. The construction of ver. 13 is disputed. The "way" may either mean conduct or fate, and the word rendered in the A.V. and R.V. "folly" has also the meaning of stupid security or self-confidence. It seems best to regard the sentence as not pronouncing again that the conduct described in vv. 6–11 is foolish, but that the end foretold in ver. 12 surely falls on such as have that dogged insensibility to the facts of life which issues in such presumptuous assurance. Many commentators would carry on the sentence into ver. 13 *b*, and extend the "lot" to those who in after-generations approve their sayings. But the paradoxical fact that notwithstanding each generation's experience the delusion is obstinately maintained from father to son yields a fuller meaning. In either case the notes of the musical interlude fix attention on the thought, in order to make the force of the following contrast greater. That contrast first deals with the fate of godless men after death. The comparison with the "beasts" in the refrain may have suggested the sombre grandeur of the metaphor in ver. 14 *a* and *b*: Sheol is as a great fold into which flocks are driven. There Death rules as the shepherd of that dim realm. What a contrast to the fold and the flock of the other Shepherd, who guides His unterrified sheep through the "valley of the shadow of death"! The waters of stillness beside which this sad shepherd makes

his flock lie down are doleful and sluggish. There is no cheerful activity for these, nor any fair pastures, but they are penned in compelled inaction in that dreadful fold.

So far the picture is comparatively clear, but with the next clause difficulties begin. Does the "morning" mean only the end of the night of trouble, the beginning in this life of the "upright's" deliverance, or have we here an eschatological utterance? The whole of the rest of the verse has to do with the unseen world, and to confine this clause to the temporal triumph of the righteous over their dead oppressors drags in an idea belonging to another sphere altogether. We venture to regard the interpretation of these enigmatical words, which sees in them a dim adumbration of a great morning which will yet stream its light into the land of darkness, and in which not this or that upright man but the class as a whole shall triumph, as the only one which keeps the parts of the verse in unity. It is part of the "riddle" of the psalmist, probably not perfectly explicable to himself. We cannot say that there is here the clear teaching of a resurrection, but there is the germ of it, whether distinctly apprehended by the singer or not. The first glimpses of truth in all regions are vague, and the gazer does not know that the star he sees is a sun. Not otherwise did the great truths of the future life rise on inspired men of old. This psalmist divined, or, more truly, heard in his bent ear, that Good and its lovers should triumph beyond the grave, and that somehow a morning would break for them. But he knew nothing of any such for the godless dead. And the remainder of the verse expresses in enigmatical brevity and obscurity the gloomy fate of those for whom there was no such awakening as

he hoped for himself. Very different renderings have been given of the gnarled words. If we adhere to the accents, the literal translation is, "Their form is [destined] for the wasting of Sheol, from a dwelling-place for it," or "without its dwelling-place"—an obscure saying, which is, however, intelligible when rendered as above. It describes the wasting away of the whole man, not merely his corporeal form, in Sheol, of which the corruption of the body in the grave may stand as a terrible symbol, so that only a thin shred of personality remains, which wanders homeless, unclothed with any house either "of this tabernacle" or any other, and so found drearily naked. Homeless desolation of bare being, from which all that is fair or good has been gnawed away, is awfully expressed in the words. Other renderings, neglecting the accents and amending the text, bring out other meanings: such as "Their form is for corruption; Hades [will be] its dwelling-place" (Jennings and Lowe); "Their form shall waste away. Sheol shall be their castle for ever" (so Cheyne in "Book of Psalms"; in "Orig. of Psalt." *frame* is substituted for *form*, and *palace* for *castle*. Baethgen gives up the attempt to render the text or to restore it, and takes to asterisks).

To this condition of dismal inactivity, as of sheep penned in a fold, of loss of beauty, of wasting and homelessness, the psalmist opposes the fate which he has risen to anticipate for himself. Ver. 15 is plainly antithetical, not only to ver. 14, but to ver. 7. The "redemption" which was impossible with men is possible with God. The emphatic particle of asseveration and restriction at the beginning is, as we have remarked, characteristic of the parallel Psalm lxiii. It here strengthens the expression of confidence, and points to God as

alone able to deliver His servant from the "hand of Sheol." That deliverance is clearly not escape from the universal lot, which the psalmist has just proclaimed so impressively as affecting wise and foolish alike. But while he expects that he, too, will have to submit to the strong hand that plucks all men from their dwelling-places, he has won the assurance that sameness of outward lot covers absolute difference in the conditions of those who are subjected to it. The faith that he will be delivered from the power of Sheol does not necessarily imply the specific kind of deliverance involved in resurrection, and it may be a question whether that idea was definitely before the singer's mind. But, without dogmatising on that doubtful point, plainly his expectation was of a life beyond death, the antithesis of the cheerless one just painted in such gloomy colours. The very brevity of the second clause of the verse makes it the more emphatic.

The same pregnant phrase occurs again with the same emphasis in Psalm lxxiii. 24, "Thou shalt take me," and in both passages the psalmist is obviously quoting from the narrative of Enoch's translation. "God took him" (Gen. v. 24). He has fed his faith on that signal instance of the end of a life of communion with God, and it has confirmed the hopes which such a life cannot but kindle, so that he is ready to submit to the common lot, bearing in his heart the assurance that, in experiencing it, he will not be driven by that grim shepherd into his gloomy fold, but lifted by God into His own presence. As in Psalms xvi. and xvii., we have here the certainty of immortality filling a devout soul as the result of present experience of communion with God. These great utterances as to the two contrasted conditions after death are, in one

aspect, the psalmist's "riddle," in so far as they are stated in "dark and cloudy words," but, in another view, are the solution of the painful enigma of the prosperity of the godless and the afflictions of the righteous. Fittingly the Selah follows this solemn, great hope.

As the first part began with the psalmist's encouraging of himself to put away fear, so the whole ends with the practical application of the truths declared, in the exhortation to others not to be terrified nor bewildered out of their faith by the insolent inflated prosperity of the godless. The lofty height of wholesome mysticism reached in the anticipation of personal immortality is not maintained in this closing part. The ground of the exhortation is simply the truth proclaimed in the first part, with additional emphasis on the thought of the necessary parting from all wealth and pomp. "Shrouds have no pockets." All the external is left behind, and much of the inward too—such as habits, desires, ways of thinking, and acquirements which have been directed to and bounded by the seen and temporal. What is not left behind is character and desert. The man of this world is wrenched from his possessions by death; but he who has made God his portion here carries his portion with him, and does not enter on that other state

> "in utter nakedness,
> But trailing clouds of glory does he come
> *To* God who is his home."

Our Lord's parable of the foolish rich man has echoes of this psalm. "Whose shall those things be?" reminds us of "He will not take away any of it"; and "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up . . . take thine ease" is the best explanation of what the psalmist

meant by "blessing his soul." The godless rich man of the psalm is a selfish and godless one. His condemnation lies not in his wealth, but in his absorption in it and reliance upon it, and in his cherishing the dream of perpetual enjoyment of it, or at least shunning the thought of its loss. Therefore, "when he dies, he goes to the generation of his fathers," who are conceived of as gathered in solemn assembly in that dark realm. "Generation" here implies, as it often does, moral similarity. It includes all the man's predecessors of like temper with himself. A sad company sitting there in the dark! *Going to them* is not identical with death nor with burial, but implies at least some rudimentary notion of companionship according to character, in that land of darkness. The *darkness* is the privation of all which deserves the name of light, whether it be joy or purity. Ver. 18 *b* is by some taken to be the psalmist's address to the rich man, and by others to be spoken to the disciple who had been bidden not to fear. In either case it brings in the thought of the popular applause which flatters success, and plays chorus to the prosperous man's own self-congratulations. Like ver. 13 *b*, it gibbets the servile admiration of such men, as indicating what the praisers would fain themselves be, and as a disclosure of that base readiness to worship the rising sun, which has for its other side contempt for the unfortunate who should receive pity and help.

The refrain is slightly but significantly varied. Instead of "abides not," it reads "and has not understanding." The alteration in the Hebrew is very slight, the two verbs differing only by one letter, and the similarity in sound is no doubt the reason for the selection of the word. But the change brings out the limitations under which the first form of the refrain is

true, and guards the whole teaching of the psalm from being taken to be launched at rich men as such. The illuminative addition in this second form shows that it is the abuse of riches, when they steal away that recognition of God and of man's mortality which underlies the psalmist's conception of *understanding*, that is doomed to destruction like the beasts that are put to silence. The two forms of the refrain are, then, precisely parallel to our Lord's two sayings, when He first declared that it was hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven, and then, in answer to His disciples' surprise, put His dictum in the more definite form, "How hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom!"

PSALM L.

1 El, Elohim, Jehovah has spoken, and called the earth
From the place of sunrise to its going down.
2 From Zion, the perfection of beauty,
God has shone.
3 Our God will come, and cannot be silent:
Fire devours before Him,
And round Him it is tempestuous exceedingly.
4 He calls to the heavens above,
And to the earth, that He may judge His people:
5 "Assemble to Me My favoured ones,
Who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice."
6 And the heavens declare His righteousness;
For God—the judge is He. Selah.

7 Hearken, My people, and I will speak;
O Israel, and I will witness against thee:
Elohim, thy God am I.
8 Not on [account of] thy sacrifices will I reprove thee;
Yea, thy burnt offerings are before me continually.
9 I will not take a bullock out of thy house,
Nor out of thy folds he-goats.
10 For Mine is every beast of the forest,
The cattle on the mountains in thousands.
11 I know every bird of the mountains,
And whatever moves on the field is before Me.
12 If I were hungry, I would not tell thee:
For Mine is the world and its fulness.
13 Shall I eat the flesh of bulls, or the blood of he-goats shall I drink?
14 Sacrifice to God thanksgiving;
And pay thy vows to the Most High:
15 And call on Me in the day of trouble.
I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me.

16 But to the wicked [man] God saith,
What hast thou to do to tell My statutes,
And that thou takest My covenant into thy mouth?
17 And [all the while] thou hatest correction,
And flingest My words behind thee.
18 If thou seest a robber, thou art pleased with him;
And with adulterers is thy portion.
19 Thy mouth thou dost let loose for evil,
And thy tongue weaves deceit.
20 Thou sittest [and] speakest against thy brother;
At thine own mother's son thou aimest a thrust.
21 These things hast thou done, and I was silent;
Thou thoughtest that I was altogether like thyself:
I will reprove thee, and order [the proofs] before thine eyes.

22 Consider now this, ye that forget God,
Lest I tear you in pieces, and there be no deliverer:
23 He who offers thanksgiving as sacrifice glorifies Me;
And he who orders his way [aright]—I will show him the salvation of God.

THIS is the first of the Asaph psalms, and is separated from the other eleven (Psalms lxxiii.–lxxxiii.) for reasons that do not appear. Probably they are no more recondite than the verbal resemblance between the summons to all the earth at the beginning of Psalm xlix. and the similar proclamation in the first verses of Psalm l. The arrangement of the Psalter is often obviously determined by such slight links. The group has certain features in common, of which some appear here: *e.g.*, the fondness for descriptions of theophanies; the prominence given to God's judicial action; the preference for the Divine names of El, Adonai (the Lord), Elyōn (Most High). Other peculiarities of the class—*e.g.*, the love for the designation "Joseph" for the nation, and delight in the image of the Divine Shepherd—are not found in this psalm. It contains no historical allusions which aid in dating it. The leading idea of

it—viz., the depreciation of outward sacrifice—is unhesitatingly declared by many to have been impossible in the days of the Levite Asaph, who was one of David's musical staff. But is it so certain that such thoughts were foreign to the period in which Samuel declared that obedience was better than sacrifice? Certainly the tone of the psalm is that of later prophets, and there is much probability in the view that Asaph is the name of the family or guild of singers from whom these psalms came rather than that of an individual.

The structure is clear and simple. There is, first, a magnificent description of God's coming to judgment and summoning heaven and earth to witness while He judges His people (vv. 1–6). The second part (vv. 7–15) proclaims the worthlessness of sacrifice; and the third (vv. 16–21) brands hypocrites who pollute God's statutes by taking them into their lips while their lives are foul. A closing strophe of two verses (22, 23) gathers up the double lesson of the whole.

The first part falls again into two, of three verses each, of which the former describes the coming of the judge, and the latter the opening of the judgment. The psalm begins with a majestic heaping together of the Divine names, as if a herald were proclaiming the style and titles of a mighty king at the opening of a solemn assize. No English equivalents are available, and it is best to retain the Hebrew, only noting that each name is separated from the others by the accents in the original, and that to render either "the mighty God" (A.V.) or "the God of gods" is not only against that punctuation, but destroys the completeness symbolised by the threefold designation. Hupfeld finds the heaping together of names "frosty." Some ears will rather hear in it a solemn reiteration like the boom

of triple thunders. Each name has its own force of meaning. El speaks of God as mighty; Elohim, as the object of religious fear; Jehovah, as the self-existent and covenant God.

The earth from east to west is summoned, not to be judged, but to witness God judging His people. The peculiarity of this theophany is that God is not represented as coming from afar or from above, but as letting His light blaze out from Zion, where He sits enthroned. As His presence made the city "the joy of the whole earth" (Psalm xlviii. 2), so it makes Zion the sum of all beauty. The idea underlying the representation of His shining out of Zion is that His presence among His people makes certain His judgment of their worship. It is the poetic clothing of the prophetic announcement, "You only have I known of all the inhabitants of the earth; therefore will I punish you for your iniquities." The seer beholds the dread pomp of the advent of the Judge, and describes it with accessories familiar in such pictures: devouring fire is His forerunner, as clearing a path for Him among tangles of evil, and wild tempests whirl round His stable throne. "He cannot be silent." The form of the negation in the original is emotional or emphatic, conveying the idea of the impossibility of His silence in the face of such corruptions.

The opening of the court or preparation for the judgment follows. That Divine voice speaks, summoning heaven and earth to attend as spectators of the solemn process. The universal significance of God's relation to and dealings with Israel, and the vindication of His righteousness by His inflexible justice dealt out to their faults, are grandly taught in this making heaven and earth assessors of that tribunal. The court having

been thus constituted, the Judge on His seat, the spectators standing around, the accused are next brought in. There is no need to be prosaically definite as to the attendants who are bidden to escort them. His officers are everywhere, and to ask who they are in the present case is to apply to poetry the measuring lines meant for bald prose. It is more important to note the names by which the persons to be judged are designated. They are "My favoured ones, who have made a covenant with Me by (lit. *over*) sacrifice." These terms carry an indictment, recalling the lavish mercies so unworthily requited, and the solemn obligations so unthankfully broken. The application of the name "favoured ones" to the whole nation is noteworthy. In other psalms it is usually applied to the more devout section, who are by it sharply distinguished from the mass; here it includes the whole. It does not follow that the diversity of usage indicates difference of date. All that is certainly shown is difference of point of view. Here the ideal of the nation is set forth, in order to bring out more emphatically the miserable contrast of the reality. Sacrifice is set aside as worthless in the subsequent verses. But could the psalmist have given clearer indication that his depreciation is not to be exaggerated into entire rejection of external rites, than by thus putting in front of it the worth of sacrifice when offered aright, as the means of founding and sustaining covenant relations with God? If his own words had been given heed to, his commentators would have been saved the blunder of supposing that he is antagonistic to the sacrificial worship which he thus regards.

But before the assize opens, the heavens, which had been summoned to behold, declare beforehand His righteousness, as manifested by the fact that He is

about to judge His people. The Selah indicates that a long-drawn swell of music fills the expectant pause before the Judge speaks from His tribunal.

The second part (vv. 7–15) deals with one of the two permanent tendencies which work for the corruption of religion—namely, the reliance on external worship, and neglect of the emotions of thankfulness and trust. God appeals first to the relation into which He has entered with the people, as giving Him the right to judge. There may be a reference to the Mosaic formula, "I am Jehovah, thy God," which is here converted, in accordance with the usage of this book of the Psalter, into "God (Elohim), thy God." The formula which was the seal of laws when enacted is also the warrant for the action of the Judge. He has no fault to find with the external acts of worship. They are abundant and "continually before Him." Surely this declaration at the outset sets aside the notion that the psalmist was launching a polemic against sacrifices *per se*. It distinctly takes the ground that the habitual offering of these was pleasing to the Judge. Their presentation continually is not reproved, but approved. What then is condemned? Surely it can be nothing but sacrifice without the thanksgiving and prayer required in vv. 14, 15. The irony of vv. 9–13 is directed against the folly of believing that in sacrifice itself God delighted; but the shafts are pointless as against offerings which are embodied gratitude and trust. The gross stupidity of supposing that man's gift makes the offering to be God's more truly than before is laid bare in the fine, sympathetic glance at the free, wild life of forest, mountain, and plain, which is all God's possession, and present to His upholding thought, and by the side of which man's folds are very small affairs.

"The cattle" in ver. 10 are not, as usually, domesticated animals, but the larger wild animals. They graze or roam "on the mountains of a thousand"—a harsh expression, best taken, perhaps, as meaning mountains where thousands [of the cattle] are. But the omission of one letter gives the more natural reading "mountains of God" (*cf.* Psalm xxxvi. 6). It is adopted by Olshausen and Cheyne, and smooths the construction, but has against it its obliteration of the fine thought of the multitudes of creatures peopling the untravelled hills. The word rendered "whatever moves" is obscure; but that meaning is accepted by most. Cheyne in his Commentary gives as alternative "that which comes forth abundantly," and in "Orig. of Psalt.," 473, "offspring." All these are "with Me"—*i.e.*, present to his mind—a parallel to "I know" in the first clause of the same verse.

Vv. 12, 13, turn the stream of irony on another absurdity involved in the superstition attacked—the grossly material thought of God involved in it. What good do bulls' flesh and goats' blood do to Him? But if these are expressions of thankful love, they are delightsome to Him. Therefore the section ends with the declaration that the true sacrifice is thanksgiving and the discharge of vows. Men honour God by asking and taking, not by giving. They glorify Him when, by calling on Him in trouble, they are delivered; and then, by thankfulness and service, as well as by the evidence which their experience gives that prayer is not in vain, they again glorify Him. All sacrifices are God's before they are offered, and do not become any more His by being offered. He neither needs nor can partake of material sustenance. But men's hearts are not His without their glad surrender, in the same

way as after it; and thankful love, trust, and obedience are as the food of God, sacrifices acceptable, well-pleasing to Him.

The third part of the psalm is still sterner in tone. It strikes at the other great corruption of worship by hypocrites. As has been often remarked, it condemns breaches of the second table of the law, just as the former part may be regarded as dealing with transgressions of the first. The eighth, seventh, and ninth commandments are referred to in vv. 18, 19, as examples of the hypocrites' sins. The irreconcilable contradiction of their professions and conduct is vividly brought out in the juxtaposition of "declare My statutes" and "castest My words behind thee." They do two opposite things with the same words—at the same time proclaiming them with all lip-reverence, and scornfully flinging them behind their backs in their conduct. The word rendered in the A.V. "slanderest" is better taken as in margin of the R.V., "givest a thrust," meaning to use violence so as to harm or overthrow.

Hypocrisy finds encouragement in impunity. God's silence is an emphatic way of expressing His patient tolerance of evil unpunished. Such "long-suffering" is meant to lead to repentance, and indicates God's unwillingness to smite. But, as experience shows, it is often abused, and "because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, the heart of the sons of men is throughly set in them to do evil." The gross mind has gross conceptions of God. One nemesis of hypocrisy is the dimming of the idea of the righteous Judge. All sin darkens the image of God. When men turn away from God's self-revelation, as they do by transgression and most fatally by hypocrisy, they cannot but make a God after their own image. Browning

has taught us in his marvellous "Caliban on Setebos" how a coarse nature projects its own image into the heavens and calls it God. God made man in His own likeness. Men who have lost that likeness make God in theirs, and so sink deeper in evil till He speaks. Then comes an apocalypse to the dreamer, when there is flashed before him what God is and what he himself is. How terror-stricken the gaze of these eyes before which God arrays the deeds of a life, seen for the first time in their true character! It will be the hypocrite's turn to keep silence then, and his thought of a complaisant God like himself will perish before the stern reality.

The whole teaching of the psalm is gathered up in the two closing verses. "Ye that forget God" includes both the superstitious formalists and the hypocrites. Reflection upon such truths as those of the psalm will save them from else inevitable destruction. "This" points on to ver. 23, which is a compendium of both parts of the psalm. The true worship, which consists in thankfulness and praise, is opposed in ver. 23 *a* to mere externalisms of sacrifice, as being the right way of glorifying God. The second clause presents a difficulty. But it would seem that we must expect to find in it a summing up of the warning of the third part of the psalm similar to that of the second part in the preceding clause. That consideration goes against the rendering in the R.V. margin (adopted from Delitzsch): "and prepares a way [by which] I may show," etc. The ellipsis of the relative is also somewhat harsh. The literal rendering of the ambiguous words is, "one setting a way." Graetz, who is often wild in his emendations, proposes a very slight one here—the change of one letter, which would yield a good

meaning: "he that is perfect in his way." Cheyne adopts this, and it eases a difficulty. But the received text is capable of the rendering given in the A.V., and, even without the natural supplement "aright," is sufficiently intelligible. To order one's way or "conversation" is, of course, equivalent to giving heed to it according to God's word, and is the opposite of the conduct stigmatised in vv. 16–21. The promise to him who thus acts is that he shall see God's salvation, both in the narrower sense of daily interpositions for deliverance, and in the wider of a full and final rescue from all evil and endowment with all good. The psalm has as keen an edge for modern as for ancient sins. Superstitious reliance on externals of worship survives, though sacrifices have ceased; and hypocrites, with their mouths full of the Gospel, still cast God's words behind them, as did those ancient hollow-hearted proclaimers and breakers of the Law.

PSALM LI.

1 Be gracious to me, O God, according to Thy loving-kindness:
According to the greatness of Thy compassions blot out my transgressions.
2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
And from my sin make me clean.
3 For I, I know my transgressions:
And my sin is before me continually.
4 Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned,
And done what is evil in Thine eyes:
That Thou mightest appear righteous when Thou speakest,
And clear when Thou judgest.

5 Behold, in iniquity was I born;
And in sin did my mother conceive me.
6 Behold, Thou desirest truth in the inward parts:
Therefore in the hidden part make me to know wisdom

7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean:
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
8 Make me to hear joy and gladness;
That the bones Thou hast crushed may exult.
9 Hide Thy face from my sins, and all my iniquities blot out.

10 A clean heart create for me, O God;
And a steadfast spirit renew within me.
11 Cast me not out from Thy presence;
And Thy holy spirit take not from me.
12 Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation:
And with a willing spirit uphold me.

13 [Then] will I teach trangressors Thy ways;
And sinners shall return to Thee.

14 Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation;
And my tongue shall joyfully sing Thy righteousness.
15 Lord, open my lips;
And my mouth shall declare Thy praise.
16 For Thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it?
In burnt offering Thou hast no pleasure.
17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit:
A heart broken and crushed, O God, Thou wilt not despise.

18 Do good in Thy good pleasure to Zion:
O build the walls of Jerusalem.
19 Then shalt Thou delight in sacrifices of righteousness, burnt offering and whole burnt offering:
Then shall they offer bullocks on Thine altar.

THE main grounds on which the Davidic authorship of this psalm is denied are four. First, it is alleged that its conceptions of sin and penitence are in advance of his stage of religious development; or, as Cheyne puts it, "David could not have had these ideas" ("Aids to Dev. Study of Crit.," 166). The impossibility depends on a theory which is not yet so established as to be confidently used to settle questions of date. Again, the psalmist's wail, "Against Thee only have I sinned," is said to be conclusive proof that the wrong done to Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah cannot be referred to. But is not *God* the correlative of *sin*, and may not the same act be qualified in one aspect as a crime and in another as a sin, bearing in the latter character exclusive relation to God? The prayer in ver. 18 is the ground of a third objection to the Davidic authorship. Certainly it is hopeless to attempt to explain "Build the walls of Jerusalem" as David's prayer. But the opinion held by both advocates and opponents of David's authorship, that vv. 18, 19, are a later liturgical addition, removes this difficulty. Another ground on which the psalm is brought down

to a late date is the resemblances in it to Isa. xl.–lxvi., which are taken to be echoes of the prophetic words. The resemblances are undoubted; the assumption that the psalmist is the copyist is not.

The personified nation is supposed by most modern authorities to be the speaker; and the date is sometimes taken to be the Restoration period, before the rebuilding of the walls by Nehemiah (Cheyne, "Orig. of Psalt.," 162); by others, the time of the Babylonish exile; and, as usual, by some, the Maccabean epoch. It puts a considerable strain upon the theory of personification to believe that these confessions of personal sin, and longing cries for a clean heart, which so many generations have felt to fit their most secret experiences, were not the wailings of a soul which had learned the burden of individuality, by consciousness of sin, and by realisation of the awful solitude of its relation to God. There are also expressions in the psalm which seem to clog the supposition that the speaker is the nation with great difficulties —*e.g.*, the reference to birth in ver. 5, the prayer for inward truth in ver. 6, and for a clean heart in ver. 10. Baethgen acknowledges that the two latter only receive their full meaning when applied to an individual. He quotes Olshausen, a defender of the national reference, who really admits the force of the objection to it, raised on the ground of these expressions, while he seeks to parry it by saying that "it is not unnatural that the poet, speaking in the singular, should, although he writes for the congregation, bring in occasional expressions here and there which do not fit the community so well as they do each individual in it." The acknowledgment is valuable; the attempt to turn its edge may be left to the reader's judgment.

In vv. 1–9 the psalmist's cry is chiefly for pardon; in

vv. 10–12 he prays chiefly for purity; in vv. 13–17 he vows grateful service. Vv. 18, 19, are probably a later addition.

The psalm begins with at once grasping the character of God as the sole ground of hope. That character has been revealed in an infinite number of acts of love. The very number of the psalmist's sins drove him to contemplate the yet greater number of God's mercies. For where but in an infinite placableness and loving-kindness could he find pardon? If the Davidic authorship is adopted, this psalm followed Nathan's assurance of forgiveness, and its petitions are the psalmist's efforts to lay hold of that assurance. The revelation of God's love precedes and causes true penitence. Our prayer for forgiveness is the appropriation of God's promise of forgiveness. The assurance of pardon does not lead to a light estimate of sin, but drives it home to the conscience.

The petitions of vv. 1, 2, teach us how the psalmist thought of sin. They are all substantially the same, and their repetition discloses the depth of longing in the suppliant. The language fluctuates between plural and singular nouns, designating the evil as "transgressions" and as "iniquity" and "sin." The psalmist regards it, first, as a multitude of separate acts, then as all gathered together into a grim unity. The single deeds of wrong-doing pass before him. But these have a common root; and we must not only recognise acts, but that alienation of heart from which they come—not only sin as it comes out in the life, but as it is coiled round our hearts. Sins are the manifestations of sin.

We note, too, how the psalmist realises his personal responsibility. He reiterates "my"—"*my* transgressions, *my* iniquity, *my* sin." He does not throw blame

on circumstances, or talk about temperament or maxims of society or bodily organisation. All these had some share in impelling him to sin; but after all allowance made for them, the deed is the doer's, and he must bear its burden.

The same eloquent synonyms for evil deeds which are found in Psalm xxxii. occur again here. "Transgression" is literally *rebellion*; "iniquity," *that which is twisted* or *bent*; "sin," *missing a mark*. Sin is rebellion, the uprising of the will against rightful authority—not merely the breach of abstract propriety or law, but opposition to a living Person, who has right to obedience. The definition of virtue is obedience to God, and the sin in sin is the assertion of independence of God and opposition to His will.

Not less profound is that other name, which regards sin as "iniquity" or distortion. Then there is a straight line to which men's lives should run parallel. Our life's paths should be like these conquering Roman roads, turning aside for nothing, but going straight to their aim over mountain and ravine, stream or desert. But this man's passion had made for him a crooked path, where he found no end, "in wandering mazes lost." Sin is, further, missing an aim, the aim being either the Divine purpose for man, the true Ideal of manhood, or the satisfaction proposed by the sinner to himself as the result of his sin. In both senses every sin misses the mark.

These petitions show also how the psalmist thought of forgiveness. As the words for sin give a threefold view of it, so those for pardon set it forth in three aspects. "Blot out";—that petition conceives of forgiveness as being the erasure of a writing, perhaps of an indictment. Our past is a blurred manuscript, full of

false and bad things. The melancholy theory of some thinkers is summed up in the despairing words, "What I have written, I have written." But the psalmist knew better than that; and we should know better than he did. Our souls may become palimpsests; and, as devotional meditations might be written by a saint on a parchment that had borne foul legends of false gods, the bad writing on them may be obliterated, and God's law be written there. "Wash me thoroughly" needs no explanation. But the word employed is significant, in that it probably means washing by kneading or beating, not by simple rinsing. The psalmist is ready to submit to any painful discipline, if only he may be cleansed. "Wash me, beat me, tread me down, hammer me with mallets, dash me against stones, do anything with me, if only these foul stains are melted from the texture of my soul." The psalmist had not heard of the alchemy by which men can "wash their robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb"; but he held fast by God's "loving-kindness," and knew the blackness of his own sin, and groaned under it; and therefore his cry was not in vain. An anticipation of the Christian teaching as to forgiveness lies in his last expression for pardon, "make me clean," which is the technical word for the priestly act of declaring ceremonial purity, and for the other priestly act of making as well as declaring clean from the stains of leprosy. The suppliant thinks of his guilt not only as a blotted record or as a polluted robe, but as a fatal disease, the "first-born of death," and as capable of being taken away only by the hand of the Priest laid on the feculent mass. We know who put out His hand and touched the leper, and said, "I will: be thou clean."

The petitions for cleansing are, in ver. 3, urged on

the ground of the psalmist's consciousness of sin. Penitent confession is a condition of forgiveness. There is no need to take this verse as giving the reason why the psalmist offered his prayer, rather than as presenting a plea why it should be answered. Some commentators have adopted the former explanation, from a fear lest the other should give countenance to the notion that repentance is a meritorious cause of forgiveness; but that is unnecessary scrupulousness. "Sin is always sin, and deserving of punishment, whether it is confessed or not. Still, confession of sin is of importance on this account—that God will be gracious to none but to those who confess their sin" (Luther, quoted by Perowne).

Ver. 4 sounds the depths in both its clauses. In the first the psalmist shuts out all other aspects of his guilt, and is absorbed in its solemnity as viewed in relation to God. It is asked, How could David have thought of his sin, which had in so many ways been "against" others, as having been "against Thee, Thee only"? As has been noted above, this confession has been taken to demonstrate conclusively the impossibility of the Davidic authorship. But surely it argues a strange ignorance of the language of a penitent soul, to suppose that such words as the psalmist's could be spoken only in regard to sins which had no bearing at all on other men. David's deed had been a crime against Bathsheba, against Uriah, against his family and his realm; but these were not its blackest characteristics. Every crime against man is sin against God. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these . . . ye have done it unto Me" is the spirit of the Decalogue as well as the language of Jesus. And it is only when considered as having relation to God that

crimes are darkened into sins. The psalmist is stating a strictly true and profound thought when he declares that he has sinned "against Thee only." Further, that thought has, for the time being, filled his whole horizon. Other aspects of his shameful deed will torture him enough in coming days, even when he has fully entered into the blessedness of forgiveness; but they are not present to his mind now, when the one awful thought of his perverted relation to God swallows up all others. A man who has never felt that all-engrossing sense of his sin as against God only has much to learn.

The second clause of ver. 4 opens the question whether "in order that" is always used in the Old Testament in its full meaning as expressing intention, or sometimes in the looser signification of "so that," expressing result. Several passages usually referred to on this point (*e.g.*, Psalm xxx. 12; Exod. xi. 9; Isa. xliv. 9; Hos. viii. 4) strongly favour the less stringent view, which is also in accordance with the genius of the Hebrew race, who were not metaphysicians. The other view, that the expression here means "in order that," insists on grammatical precision in the cries of a penitent heart, and clogs the words with difficulty. If their meaning is that the psalmist's sin was intended to show forth God's righteousness in judging, the intention must have been God's, not the sinner's; and such a thought not only ascribes man's sin directly to God, but is quite irrelevant to the psalmist's purpose in the words. For he is not palliating his transgression or throwing it on Divine predestination (as Cheyne takes him to be doing), but is submitting himself, in profoundest abasement of undivided guilt, to the just judgment of God. His prayer for forgiveness is accompanied with willingness to submit to chastisement, as all true desire for

pardon is. He makes no excuses for his sin, but submits himself unconditionally to the just judgment of God. "Thou remainest the Holy One; I am the sinner; and therefore Thou mayest, with perfect justice, punish me and spurn me from Thy presence" (Stier).

Vv. 5, 6, are marked as closely related by the "Behold" at the beginning of each. The psalmist passes from penitent contemplation and confession of his acts of sin to acknowledge his sinful nature, derived from sinful parents. "Original sin" is theological terminology for the same facts which science gathers together under the name of "heredity." The psalmist is not responsible for later dogmatic developments of the idea, but he feels that he has to confess not only his acts but his nature. "A corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit." The taint is transmitted. No fact is more plain than this, as all the more serious observers of human life and of their own characters have recognised. Only a superficial view of humanity or an inadequate conception of morality can jauntily say that "all children are born good." Theologians have exaggerated and elaborated, as is their wont, and so have made the thought repugnant; but the derived sinful bias of human nature is a fact, not a dogma, and those who know it and their own share of it best will be disposed to agree with Browning, in finding one great reason for believing in Biblical religion, that—

> "'Tis the faith that launched point-blank her dart
> At the head of a lie—taught Original Sin,
> The Corruption of Man's Heart."

The psalmist is not, strictly speaking, either extenuating or aggravating his sin by thus recognising his evil nature. He does not think that sin is the less his,

because the tendency has been inherited. But he is spreading all his condition before God. In fact, he is not so much thinking of his criminality as of his desperate need. From a burden so heavy and so intertwined with himself none but God can deliver him. He cannot cleanse himself, for self is infected. He cannot find cleansing among men, for they too have inherited the poison. And so he is driven to God, or else must sink into despair. He who once sees into the black depths of his own heart will give up thereafter all ideas of "every man his own redeemer." That the psalmist's purpose was not to minimise his own guilt is clear, not only from the tone of the psalm, but from the antithesis presented by the Divine desire after inward truth in the next verse, which is out of place if this verse contains a palliation for sin.

We can scarcely miss the bearing of this verse on the question of whether the psalm is the confession of an individual penitent or that of the nation. It strongly favours the former view, though it does not make the latter absolutely impossible.

The discovery of inherent and inherited sinfulness brings with it another discovery—that of the penetrating depth of the requirements of God's law. He cannot be satisfied with outside conformity in deed. The more intensely conscience realises sin, the more solemnly rises before it the Divine ideal of man in its inwardness as well as in its sweep. Truth within—inward correspondence with His will, and absolute sincerity of soul are His desire. But I am "born in iniquity": a terrible antithesis, and hopeless but for one hope, which dawns over the suppliant like morning on a troubled sea. If we cannot ask God to make us what He wishes us to be, these two discoveries of our nature and of His

will are open doorways to despair; but he who apprehends them wisely will find in their conjoint operation a force impelling him to prayer, and therefore to confidence. Only God can enable such a Being as man to become such as He will delight in; and since He seeks for truth within, He thereby pledges Himself to give the truth and wisdom for which He seeks.

Meditation on the sin which was ever before the psalmist, passes into renewed prayers for pardon, which partly reiterate those already offered in vv. 1, 2. The petition in ver. 7 for purging with hyssop alludes to sprinkling of lepers and unclean persons, and indicates both a consciousness of great impurity and a clear perception of the symbolic meaning of ritual cleansings. "Wash me" repeats a former petition; but now the psalmist can venture to dwell more on the thought of future purity than he could do then. The approaching answer begins to make its brightness visible through the gloom, and it seems possible to the suppliant that even his stained nature shall glisten like sunlit snow. Nor does that expectation exhaust his confidence. He hopes for "joy and gladness." His bones have been crushed—*i.e.*, his whole self has been, as it were, ground to powder by the weight of God's hand; but restoration is possible. A penitent heart is not too bold when it asks for joy. There is no real well-founded gladness without the consciousness of Divine forgiveness. The psalmist closes his petitions for pardon (ver. 9) with asking God to "hide His face from his sins," so that they be, as it were, no more existent for Him, and, by a repetition of the initial petition in ver. 1, for the blotting out of "all mine inquities."

The second principal division begins with ver. 10, and is a prayer for purity, followed by vows of glad ser-

vice. The prayer is contained in three verses (10–12), of which the first implores complete renewal of nature, the second beseeches that there may be no break between the suppliant and God, and the third asks for the joy and willingness to serve which would flow from the granting of the desires preceding. In each verse the second clause has "spirit" for its leading word, and the middle one of the three asks for "*Thy* holy spirit." The petitions themselves, and the order in which they occur, are deeply significant, and deserve much more elucidation than can be given here. The same profound consciousness of inward corruption which spoke in the former part of the psalm shapes the prayer for renewal. Nothing less than a new creation will make this man's heart "clean." His past has taught him that. The word employed is always used of God's creative act; and the psalmist feels that nothing less than the power which brooded over the face of primeval chaos, and evolved thence an ordered world, can deal with the confused ruin within himself. What he felt that he must have is what prophets promised (Jer. xxiv. 7; Ezek. xxxvi. 26) and Christ has brought —a new creation, in which, while personality remains unaffected, and the components of character continue as before, a real new life is bestowed, which stamps new directions on affections, gives new aims, impulses, convictions, casts out inveterate evils, and gradually changes "all but the basis of the soul." A desire for pardon which does not unfold into such longing for deliverance from the misery of the old self is not the offspring of genuine penitence, but only of base fear.

"A steadfast spirit" is needful in order to keep a cleansed heart clean; and, on the other hand, when, by cleanness of heart, a man is freed from the perturba-

tions of rebellious desires and the weakening influences of sin, his spirit will be steadfast. The two characteristics sustain each other. Consciousness of corruption dictated the former desire; penitent recognition of weakness and fluctuation inspires the latter. It may be observed, too, that the triad of petitions having reference to "spirit" has for its central one a prayer for God's Spirit, and that the other two may be regarded as dependent on that. Where God's Spirit dwells, the human spirit in which it abides will be firm with uncreated strength. His energy, being infused into a tremulous, changeful humanity, will make it stable. If we are to stand fast, we must be stayed on God.

The group of petitions in ver. 11 is negative. It deprecates a possible tragic separation from God, and that under two aspects. "Part me not from Thee; part not Thyself from me." The former prayer, "Cast me not out from Thy presence," is by some explained according to the analogy of other instances of the occurrence of the phrase, where it means expulsion from the land of Israel; and is claimed, thus interpreted, as a clear indication that the psalmist speaks in the name of the nation. But however certainly the expression is thus used elsewhere, it cannot, without introducing an alien thought, be so interpreted in its present connection, imbedded in petitions of the most spiritual and individual character: much rather, the psalmist is recoiling from what he knows only too well to be the consequence of an unclean heart—separation from God, whether in the sense of exclusion from the sanctuary, or in the profounder sense, which is not too deep for such a psalm, of conscious loss of the light of God's face. He dreads being, Cain-like, shut out from that presence which is life; and he knows that, unless his

previous prayer for a clean heart is answered, that dreary solitude of great darkness must be his lot. The sister petition, "Take not Thy holy spirit from me," contemplates the union between God and him from the other side. He regards himself as possessing that Divine spirit; for he knows that, notwithstanding his sin, God has not left him, else he would not have these movements of godly sorrow and yearnings for purity. There is no reason to commit the anachronism of supposing that the psalmist had any knowledge of New Testament teaching of a personal Divine Spirit. But if we may suppose that he is David, this prayer has special force. That anointing which designated and fitted him for kingly office symbolised the gift of a Divine influence accompanying a Divine call. If we further remember how it had fared with his predecessor, from whom, because of impenitence, "the Spirit of the Lord departed, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him," we understand how Saul's successor, trembling as he remembers his fate, prays with peculiar emphasis, "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me."

The last member of the triad, in ver. 12, looks back to former petitions, and asks for restoration of the "joy of Thy salvation," which had lain like dew on this man before he fell. In this connection the supplication for joy follows on the other two, because the joy which it desires is the result of their being granted. For what is "Thy salvation" but the gift of a clean heart and a steadfast spirit, the blessed consciousness of unbroken closeness of communion with God, in which the suppliant suns himself in the beams of God's face, and receives an uninterrupted communication of His Spirit's gifts? These are the sources of pure joy, lasting as God Himself, and victorious over all occasions for

surface sorrow. The issue of all these gifts will be "a willing spirit," delighting to obey, eager to serve. If God's Spirit dwells in us, obedience will be delight. To serve God because we must is not service. To serve Him because we had rather do His will than anything else is the service which delights Him and blesses us. The word rendered "willing" comes by a very natural process, to mean nobles. God's servants are princes and lords of everything besides, themselves included. Such obedience is freedom. If desires flow with equable motion parallel to God's will, there is no sense of restraint in keeping within limits beyond which we do not desire to go. "I will walk at liberty; for I keep Thy precepts."

The last part of the psalm runs over with joyful vows—first, of magnifying God's name (vv. 13–15), and then of offering true sacrifices. A man who has passed through such experiences as the psalmist's, and has received the blessings for which he prayed, cannot be silent. The instinct of hearts touched by God's mercies is to speak of them to others. And no man who can say "I will tell what He has done for my soul" is without the most persuasive argument to bring to bear on others. A piece of autobiography will touch men who are unaffected by elaborate reasonings and deaf to polished eloquence. The impulse and the capacity to "teach transgressors Thy ways" are given in the experience of sin and forgiveness; and if any one has not the former, it is questionable whether he has, in any real sense or large measure, received the latter. The prayer for deliverance from blood-guiltiness in ver. 14 breaks for a moment the flow of vows; but only for a moment. It indicates how amid them the psalmist preserved his sense of guilt, and how little he

was disposed to think lightly of the sins of whose forgiveness he had prayed himself into the assurance. Its emergence here, like a black rock pushing its grimness up through a sparkling, sunny sea, is no sign of doubt whether his prayers had been answered; but it marks the abiding sense of sinfulness, which must ever accompany abiding gratitude for pardon and abiding holiness of heart. It seems hard to believe, as the advocates of a national reference in the psalm are obliged to do, that "blood-guiltiness" has no special reference to the psalmist's crime, but is employed simply as typical of sin in general. The mention of it finds a very obvious explanation on the hypothesis of Davidic authorship, and a rather constrained one on any other.

Ver. 16 introduces the reason for the preceding vow of grateful praise, as is shown by the initial "For." The psalmist will bring the sacrifices of a grateful heart making his lips musical, because he has learned that these, and not ritual offerings, are acceptable. The same depreciation of external sacrifices is strongly expressed in Psalm xl. 6, and here, as there, is not to be taken as an absolute condemnation of these, but as setting them decisively below spiritual service. To suppose that prophets or psalmists waged a polemic against ritual observances *per se* misapprehends their position entirely. They do war against "the sacrifice of the wicked," against external acts which had no inward reality corresponding to them, against reliance on the outward and its undue exaltation. The authors of the later addition to this psalm had a true conception of its drift when they appended to it, not as a correction of a heretical tendency, but as a liturgical addition in full harmony with its spirit, the vow to

"offer whole burnt offerings on" the restored "altar," when God should again build up Zion.

The psalmist's last words are immortal. "A heart broken and crushed, O God, Thou wilt not despise." But they derive still deeper beauty and pathos when it is observed that they are spoken after confession has been answered to his consciousness by pardon, and longing for purity by at least some bestowal of it. The "joy of Thy salvation," for which he had prayed, has begun to flow into his heart. The "bones" which had been "crushed" are beginning to reknit, and thrills of gladness to steal through his frame; but still he feels that with all these happy experiences contrite consciousness of his sin must mingle. It does not rob his joy of one rapture, but it keeps it from becoming careless. He goes safely who goes humbly. The more sure a man is that God has put away the iniquity of his sin, the more should he remember it; for the remembrance will vivify gratitude and bind close to Him without whom there can be no steadfastness of spirit nor purity of life. The clean heart must continue contrite, if it is not to cease to be clean.

The liturgical addition implies that Jerusalem is in ruins. It cannot be supposed without violence to come from David. It is not needed in order to form a completion to the psalm, which ends more impressively, and has an inner unity and coherence, if the deep words of ver. 17 are taken as its close.

PSALM LII.

1 Why boastest thou in wickedness, O tyrant?
God's loving-kindness lasts always.
2 Destructions does thy tongue devise;
Like a sharpened razor, thou framer of deceit!
3 Thou lovest evil rather than good;
A lie rather than speaking righteousness. Selah.

4 Thou lovest all words that swallow men up,
Thou deceitful tongue!
5 So God shall break thee down for ever,
Shall lay hold of thee and drag thee out of the tent,
And root thee out of the land of the living. Selah.

6 And the righteous shall see and fear,
And at him shall they laugh.
7 "See! the man that made not God his stronghold,
And trusted in the abundance of his wealth,
And felt strong in his evil desire."

8 But I am like a flourishing olive tree in the house of God:
I trust in the loving-kindness of God for ever and aye.
9 I will give Thee thanks for ever, for Thou hast done [this]:
And I will wait on Thy name before Thy favoured ones, for it is good.

THE progress of feeling in this psalm is clear, but there is no very distinct division into strophes, and one of the two Selahs does not mark a transition, though it does make a pause. First, the poet, with a few indignant and contemptuous touches, dashes on his canvas an outline portrait of an arrogant oppressor, whose weapon was slander and his words like pits of

ruin. Then, with vehement, exulting metaphors, he pictures his destruction. On it follow reverent awe of God, whose justice is thereby displayed, and deepened sense in righteous hearts of the folly of trust in anything but Him. Finally, the singer contrasts with thankfulness his own happy continuance in fellowship with God with the oppressor's fate, and renews his resolve of praise and patient waiting.

The themes are familiar, and their treatment has nothing distinctive. The portrait of the oppressor does not strike one as a likeness either of the Edomite herdsman Doeg, with whose betrayal of David's asylum at Nob the superscription connects the psalm, or of Saul, to whom Hengstenberg, feeling the difficulty of seeing Doeg in it, refers it. Malicious lies and arrogant trust in riches were not the crimes that cried for vengeance in the bloody massacre at Nob. Cheyne would bring this group of "Davidic" psalms (lii.–lix.) down to the Persian period ("Orig. of Psalt.," 121–23). Olshausen, after Theodore of Mopsuestia (see Cheyne *loc. cit.*) to the Maccabean. But the grounds alleged are scarcely strong enough to carry more than the weight of a "may be"; and it is better to recognise that, if the superscription is thrown over, the psalm itself does not yield sufficiently characteristic marks to enable us to fix its date. It may be worth considering whether the very absence of any obvious correspondences with David's circumstances does not show that the superscription rested on a tradition earlier than itself, and not on an editor's discernment.

The abrupt question at the beginning reveals the psalmist's long-pent indignation. He has been silently brooding over the swollen arrogance and malicious lies of the tyrant, till he can restrain himself no longer, and

out pours a fiery flood. Evil gloried in is worse than evil done. The word rendered in the A.V. and R.V. "mighty man" is here used in a bad sense, to indicate that he has not only a giant's power, but uses it tyrannously, like a giant. How dramatically the abrupt question is followed by the equally abrupt thought of the ever-during loving-kindness of God! That makes the tyrant's boast supremely absurd, and the psalmist's confidence reasonable, even in face of hostile power.

The prominence given to sins of speech is peculiar. We should have expected high-handed violence rather than these. But the psalmist is tracking the deeds to their source; and it is not so much the tyrant's words as his love of a certain kind of words which is adduced as proof of his wickedness. These words have two characteristics in addition to boastfulness. They are false and destructive. They are, according to the forcible literal meaning in ver. 4, "words of swallowing." They are, according to the literal meaning of "destructions," in ver. 2, "yawning gulfs." Such words lead to acts which make a tyrant. They flow from perverted preference of evil to good. Thus the deeds of oppression are followed up to their den and birthplace. Part of the description of the "words" corresponds to the fatal effect of Doeg's report; but nothing in it answers to the other part—falsehood. The psalmist's hot indignation speaks in the triple direct address to the tyrant, which comes in each case like a lightning flash at the end of a clause (vv. 1, 2, 4). In the second of these the epithet "framing deceit" does not refer to the "sharpened razor," but to the tyrant. If referred to the former, it weakens rather than strengthens the metaphor, by bringing in the idea that the sharp blade misses its proper aim

and wounds cheeks instead of shearing off hair. The Selah of ver. 3 interrupts the description, in order to fix attention, by a pause filled up by music, on the hideous picture thus drawn.

That description is resumed and summarised in ver. 4, which, by the Selahs, is closely bound to ver. 5, in order to enforce the necessary connection of sin and punishment, which is strongly underlined by the "also" or "so" at the beginning of the latter verse. The stern prophecy of destruction is based upon no outward signs of failure in the oppressor's might, but wholly on confidence in God's continual loving-kindness, which must needs assume attributes of justice when its objects are oppressed. A tone of triumph vibrates through the imagery of ver. 5, which is not in the same key as Christ has set for us.

It is easy for those who have never lived under grinding, godless tyranny to reprobate the exultation of the oppressed at the sweeping away of their oppressors; but if the critics had seen their brethren set up as torches to light Nero's gardens, perhaps they would have known some thrill of righteous joy when they heard that he was dead. Three strong metaphors describe the fall of this tyrant. He is broken down, as a building levelled with the ground. He is laid hold of, as a coal in the fire, with tongs (for so the word means), and dragged, as in that iron grip, out of the midst of his dwelling. He is uprooted like a tree with all its pride of leafage. Another blast of trumpets or clang of harps or clash of cymbals bids the listeners gaze on the spectacle of insolent strength laid prone, and withering as it lies.

The third movement of thought (vv. 6, 7) deals with the effects of this retribution. It is a conspicuous

demonstration of God's justice and of the folly of reliance on anything but Himself. The fear which it produces in the "righteous" is reverential awe, not dread lest the same should happen to them. Whether or not history and experience teach evil men that "verily there is a God that judgeth," their lessons are not wasted on devout and righteous souls. But this is the tragedy of life, that its teachings are prized most by those who have already learned them, and that those who need them most consider them least. Other tyrants are glad when a rival is swept off the field, but are not arrested in their own course. It is left to "the righteous" to draw the lesson which all men should have learned. Although they are pictured as laughing at the ruin, that is not the main effect of it. Rather it deepens conviction, and is a "modern instance" witnessing to the continual truth of "an old saw." There is one safe stronghold, and only one. He who conceits himself to be strong in his own evil, and, instead of relying on God, trusts in material resources, will sooner or later be levelled with the ground, dragged, resisting vainly the tremendous grasp, from his tent, and laid prostrate, as melancholy a spectacle as a great tree blown down by tempest, with its roots turned up to the sky and its arms with drooping leaves trailing on the ground.

A swift turn of feeling carries the singer to rejoice in the contrast of his own lot. No uprooting does he fear. It may be questioned whether the words "in the house of God" refer to the psalmist or to the olive tree. Apparently there were trees in the Temple area (Psalm xcii. 13); but the parallel in the next clause, "in the loving-kindness of God," points to the reference of the words to the speaker. Dwelling in enjoyment of

God's fellowship, as symbolised by and realised through presence in the sanctuary, whether it were at Nob or in Jerusalem, he dreads no such forcible removal as had befallen the tyrant. Communion with God is the source of flourishing and fruitfulness, and the guarantee of its own continuance. Nothing in the changes of outward life need touch it. The mists which lay on the psalmist's horizon are cleared away for us, who know that "for ever and aye" designates a proper eternity of dwelling in the higher house and drinking the full dew of God's loving-kindness. Such consciousness of present blessedness in communion lifts a soul to prophetic realisation of deliverance, even while no change has occurred in circumstances. The tyrant is still boasting; but the psalmist's tightened hold of God enables him to see "things that are not as though they were," and to anticipate actual deliverance by praise for it. It is the prerogative of faith to alter tenses, and to say, Thou hast done, when the world's grammar would say, Thou wilt do. "I will *wait on* Thy name" is singular, since what is done "in the presence of Thy favoured ones" would naturally be something seen or heard by them. The reading "I will declare" has been suggested. But surely the attitude of patient, silent expectance implied in "wait" may very well be conceived as maintained in the presence of, and perceptible by, those who had like dispositions, and who would sympathise and be helped thereby. Individual blessings are rightly used when they lead to participation in common thankfulness and quiet trust.

PSALM LIII.*

1 The fool says in his heart, There is no God
They corrupt *and* make abominable their *iniquity*;
There is no one doing good.
2 *God* looketh down from heaven upon the sons of men,
To see if there is any having discernment seeking after God.
3 *Each of them* is *turned aside*; together they are become putrid;
There is no one doing good;
There is not even one.
4 Do the workers of iniquity not know
Who devour my people [as] they devour bread?
On *God* they do not call.
5 There they feared a [great] fear, *where no fear was*:
For God *has scattered the bones of him that encamps against thee*;
Thou hast put *them* to shame; for God *has rejected them.*
6 Oh that the salvations of Israel were come out of Zion!
When *God* brings back the captivity of His people,
May Jacob exult, may Israel be glad!

IN this psalm we have an Elohistic recast of Psalm xiv., differing from its original in substituting Elohim for Jehovah (four times) and in the language of ver. 5. There are also other slight deviations not affecting the sense. For the exposition the reader is referred to that of Psalm xiv. It is only necessary here to take note of the divergences.

The first of these occurs in ver. 1. The forcible rough construction "they corrupt, they make abominable," is smoothed down by the insertion of "and."

* Italics show variations from text of Psalm xiv.

The editor apparently thought that the loosely piled words needed a piece of mortar to hold them together, but his emendation weakens as well as smooths. On the other hand, he has aimed at increased energy of expression by substituting "iniquity" for "doings" in the same clause, which results in tautology and is no improvement. In ver. 3 the word for "turned aside" is varied, without substantial difference of meaning. The alteration is very slight, affecting only one letter, and may be due to error in transcription or to mere desire to emend. In ver. 4 "all," which in Psalm xiv. precedes "workers of iniquity," is omitted, probably as unnecessary.

The most important changes are in ver. 5, which stands for vv. 5 and 6 of Psalm xiv. The first is the insertion of "where no fear was." These words may be taken as describing causeless panic, or, less probably, as having a subjective reference, and being equal to "while in the midst of careless security." They evidently point to some fact, possibly the destruction of Sennacherib's army. Their insertion shows that the object of the alterations was to adapt an ancient psalm as a hymn of triumph for recent deliverance, thus altering its application from evil-doers within Israel to enemies without. The same purpose is obvious in the transformations effected in the remainder of this verse. Considerable as these are, the recast most ingeniously conforms to the sound of the original. If we could present the two versions in tabular form, the resemblance would appear more strikingly than we can here bring it out. The first variation—*i.e.*, "scatters" instead of "in the generation"—is effected by reading "pizzar" for "b'dhor," a clear case of intentional assonance. Similarly the last word of the verse, "has

rejected them," is very near in consonants and sound to "his refuge" in Psalm xiv. 6. The like effort at retaining the general sound of the earlier psalm runs through the whole verse. Very significantly the complaint of the former singer is turned into triumph by the later, who addresses the delivered Israel with "Thou hast put them to shame," while the other psalm could but address the "fools" with "Ye would put to shame the counsel of the afflicted." In like manner the tremulous hope of the original, "God is his refuge," swells into commemoration of an accomplished fact in "God has rejected them." The natural supposition is that some great deliverance of Israel had just taken place, and inspired this singular attempt to fit old words to new needs. Whatever the historical occasion may have been, the two singers unite in one final aspiration, a sigh of longing for the coming of Israel's full salvation, which is intensified in the recast by being put in the plural ("salvations") instead of the singular, as in Psalm xiv., to express the completeness and manifoldness of the deliverance thus yearned for of old, and not yet come in its perfection.

PSALM LIV.

1 O God, by Thy name save me,
And by Thy might right me.
2 O God, hear my prayer;
Give ear to the words of my mouth.
3 For strangers are risen up against me,
And violent men seek my soul:
They set not God before them. Selah.

4 Behold, God is a helper for me:
The Lord is He that sustains my soul.
5 He will requite evil to the liers in wait for me:
In Thy troth destroy them.
6 Of [my own] free impulse will I sacrifice to Thee:
I will thank Thy name, for it is good.
7 For from all distress it has delivered me;
And my eye has seen [its desire] on my enemies.

THE tone and language of this psalm have nothing special. The situation of the psalmist is the familiar one of being encompassed by enemies. His mood is the familiar one of discouragement at the sight of surrounding perils, which passes through petition into confidence and triumph. There is nothing in the psalm inconsistent with the accuracy of the superscription, which ascribes it to David, when the men of Ziph would have betrayed him to Saul. Internal evidence does not suffice to fix its date, if the traditional one is discarded. But there seems no necessity for re-

garding the singer as the personified nation, though there is less objection to that theory in this instance than in some psalms with a more marked individuality and more fervent expression of personal emotion, to which it is proposed to apply it.

The structure is simple, like the thought and expression. The psalm falls into two parts, divided by Selah, —of which the former is prayer, spreading before God the suppliant's straits; and the latter is confident assurance, blended with petition and vows of thanksgiving.

The order in which the psalmist's thoughts run in the first part (vv. 1–3) is noteworthy. He begins with appeal to God, and summons before his vision the characteristics in the Divine nature on which he builds his hope. Then he pleads for the acceptance of his prayer, and only when thus heartened does he recount his perils. That is a deeper faith which begins with what God is, and thence proceeds to look calmly at foes, than that which is driven to God in the second place, as a consequence of an alarmed gaze on dangers. In the latter case fear strikes out a spark of faith in the darkness; in the former, faith controls fear.

The name of God is His manifested nature or character, the sum of all of Him which has been made known by His word or work. In that rich manifoldness of living powers and splendours this man finds reserves of force, which will avail to save him from any peril. That name is much more than a collection of syllables. The expression is beginning to assume the meaning which it has in post-Biblical Hebrew, where it is used as a reverential euphemism for the ineffable Jehovah. Especially to God's power does the singer look with hopeful petitions, as in ver. 1 *b*. But the

whole name is the agent of his salvation. Nothing less than the whole fulness of the manifested God is enough for the necessities of one poor man; and that prayer is not too bold, nor that estimate of need presumptuous, which asks for nothing less. Since it is God's "might" which is appealed to, to judge the psalmist's cause, the judgment contemplated is clearly not the Divine estimate of the moral desert of his doings, or retribution to him for these, but the vindication of his threatened innocence and deliverance of him from enemies. The reason for the prayer is likewise alleged as a plea with God to hear. The psalmist prays because he is ringed about by foes. God will hear because He is so surrounded. It is blessed to know that the same circumstances in our lot which drive us to God incline God to us.

"Strangers," in ver. 3, would most naturally mean foreigners, but not necessarily so. The meaning would naturally pass into that of enemies—men who, even though of the psalmist's own blood, behave to him in a hostile manner. The word, then, does not negative the tradition in the superscription; though the men of Ziph belonged to the tribe of Judah, they might still be called "strangers." The verse recurs in Psalm lxxxvi. 14, with a variation of reading—namely, "proud" instead of "strangers." The same variation is found here in some MSS. and in the Targum. But probably it has crept in here in order to bring our psalm into correspondence with the other, and it is better to retain the existing reading, which is that of the LXX. and other ancient authorities. The psalmist has no doubt that to hunt after his life is a sign of godlessness. The proof that violent men have not "set God before them" is the fact that they "seek his soul." That is a remarkable assumption,

resting upon a very sure confidence that he is in such relation to God that enmity to him is sin. The theory of a national reference would make such identification of the singer's cause with God's most intelligible. But the theory that he is an individual, holding a definite relation to the Divine purposes and being for some end a Divine instrument, would make it quite as much so. And if David, who knew that he was destined to be king, was the singer, his confidence would be natural. The history represents that his Divine appointment was sufficiently known to make hostility to him a manifest indication of rebellion against God. The unhesitating fusion of his own cause with God's could scarcely have been ventured by a psalmist, however vigorous his faith, if all that he had to go on and desired to express was a devout soul's confidence that God would protect him. That may be perfectly true, and yet it may not follow that opposition to a man is godlessness. We cannot regard ourselves as standing in such a relation; but we may be sure that the name, with all its glories, is mighty to save us too.

Prayer is, as so often in the Psalter, followed by immediately deepened assurance of victory. The suppliant rises from his knees, and points the enemies round him to his one Helper. In ver. 4*b* a literal rendering would mislead. "The Lord is among the upholders of my soul" seems to bring God down to a level on which others stand. The psalmist does not mean this, but that God gathers up in Himself, and that supremely, the qualities belonging to the conception of an upholder. It is, in form, an inclusion of God in a certain class. It is, in meaning, the assertion that He is the only true representative of the class. Commentators quote Jephthah's plaintive words to his daughter

as another instance of the idiom: "Alas, my daughter, . . . thou art one of them that trouble me"—*i.e.*, my greatest troubler. That one thought, vivified into new power by the act of prayer, is the psalmist's all-sufficient buckler, which he plants between himself and his enemies, bidding them "behold." Strong in the confidence that has sprung in his heart anew, he can look forward in the certainty that his adversaries (lit. *those who lie in wait for me*) will find their evil recoiling on themselves. The reading of the Hebrew text is, *Evil shall return to*; that of the Hebrew margin, adopted by the A.V. and R.V., is, *He shall requite evil to.* The meanings are substantially the same, only that the one makes the automatic action of retribution more prominent, while the other emphasises God's justice in inflicting it. The latter reading gives increased force to the swift transition to prayer in ver. 5 *b*.

That petition is, like others in similar psalms, proper to the spiritual level of the Old Testament, and not to that of the New; and it is far more reverent, as well as accurate, to recognise fully the distinction than to try to slur it over. At the same time, it is not to be forgotten that the same lofty consciousness of the identity of his cause with God's, which we have already had to notice, operating here in these wishes for the enemies' destruction, gives another aspect to them than that of mere outbursts of private vengeance. That higher aspect is made prominent by the addition "in Thy troth." God's faithfulness to His purposes and promises was concerned in the destruction, because these were pledged to the psalmist's protection. His well-being was so intertwined with God's promises that the Divine faithfulness demanded the sweeping away of his foes. That is evidently not the language which

fits our lips. It implies a special relation to God's plans, and it modifies the character of this apparently vindictive prayer.

The closing verses of this simple, little psalm touch very familiar notes. The faith which has prayed has grown so sure of answer that it already begins to think of the thank-offerings. This is not like the superstitious vow, "I will give so-and-so if Jupiter"—or the Virgin—"will hear me." This praying man knows that he is heard, and is not so much vowing as joyfully anticipating his glad sacrifice. The same incipient personification of the name as in ver. 1 is very prominent in the closing strains. Thank-offerings—not merely statutory and obligatory, but brought by free, uncommanded impulse—are to be offered to "Thy name," because that name is good. Ver. 7 probably should be taken as going even further in the same direction of personification, for "Thy name" is probably to be taken as the subject of "hath delivered." The tenses of the verbs in ver. 7 are perfects. They contemplate the deliverance as already accomplished. Faith sees the future as present. This psalmist, surrounded by strangers seeking his life, can quietly stretch out a hand of faith, and bring near to himself the to-morrow when he will look back on scattered enemies and present, glad sacrifices! That power of drawing a brighter future into a dark present belongs not to those who build anticipations on wishes, but to those who found their forecasts on God's known purpose and character. *The name* is a firm foundation for hope. There is no other.

The closing words express confidence in the enemies' defeat and destruction, with a tinge of feeling that is not permissible to Christians. But the supplement,

"my desire," is perhaps rather too strongly expressive of wish for their ruin. Possibly there needs no supplement at all, and the expression simply paints the calm security of the man protected by God, who can "look upon" impotent hostility without the tremor of an eyelid, because he knows who is his Helper.

PSALM LV.

1 Give ear, O God, to my prayer;
And hide not Thyself from my entreaty.
2 Attend unto me, and answer me:
I am distracted as I muse, and must groan;
3 For the voice of [my] enemy,
On account of the oppression of the wicked;
For they fling down iniquity upon me,
And in wrath they are hostile to me.
4 My heart writhes within me:
And terrors of death have fallen upon me.
5 Fear and trembling come upon me,
Horror wraps me round.
6 Then I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove!
I would fly away, and [there] abide.
7 Lo, then would I migrate far away,
I would lodge in the wilderness. Selah.
8 I would hasten my escape
From stormy wind and tempest.

9 Swallow [them up], Lord; confuse their tongue:
For I see violence and strife in the city.
10 Day and night they go their rounds upon her walls:
And iniquity and mischief are in her midst.
11 Destructions are in her midst:
And from her open market-place depart not oppression and deceit.
12 For it is not an enemy that reviles me—that I could bear:
It is not my hater that magnifies himself against me—from him I could shelter myself:
13 But it is thou, a man my equal,
My companion, and my familiar friend.

14 We who together used to make familiar intercourse sweet,
And walked to the house of God with the crowd.
15 Desolations [fall] on them!
May they go down alive to Sheol!
For wickednesses are in their dwelling, in their midst.

16 As for me, I will cry to God;
And Jehovah will save me.
17 Evening, and morning, and noon will I muse and groan:
And He will hear my voice.
18 He has redeemed my soul in peace, so that they come not near me
For in great numbers were they round me.
19 God will hear, and answer them—
Even He that sitteth throned from of old— Selah.
Them who have no changes
And who fear not God.
20 He has laid his hands on those who were at peace with him:
He has broken his covenant.
21 Smooth are the buttery words of his mouth,
But his heart is war:
Softer are his words than oil,
Yet are they drawn swords.
22 Cast upon Jehovah thy burden,
And He, He will hold thee up:
He will never let the righteous be moved.
23 But Thou, O God, shall bring them down to the depth of the pit:
Men of blood and deceit shall not attain half their days;
But as for me, I will trust in Thee.

THE situation of the psalmist has a general correspondence with that of David in the period of Absalom's rebellion, and the identification of the traitorous friend with Ahithophel is naturally suggested But there are considerable difficulties in the way of taking that view. The psalmist is evidently in the city, from which he longs to escape; but Ahithophel's treachery was not known to David till after his flight. Would a king have described his counsellor, however trusted, as "a man my equal"? The doubt respecting the identity of the traitor, however, does not seriously

militate against the ordinary view of the date and occasion of the psalm, if we suppose that it belongs to the period immediately before the outburst of the conspiracy, when David was still in Jerusalem, but seeing the treason growing daily bolder, and already beginning to contemplate flight. The singularly passive attitude which he maintained during the years of Absalom's plotting was due to his consciousness of guilt and his submission to punishment. Hitzig ascribes the psalm to Jeremiah, principally on the ground of the resemblance of the prophet's wish for a lodge in the wilderness (Jer. ix. 2) to the psalmist's yearning in vv. 6–8. Cheyne brings it down to the Persian period; Olshausen, to the Maccabean. The Davidic authorship has at least as much to say for itself as any of these conjectures.

The psalm may be regarded as divided into three parts, in each of which a different phase of agitated feeling predominates, but not exclusively. Strong excitement does not marshal emotions or their expression according to artistic proprieties of sequence, and this psalm is all ablaze with it. That vehemence of emotion sufficiently accounts for both the occasional obscurities and the manifest want of strict accuracy in the flow of thought, without the assumption of dislocation of parts or piecing it with a fragment of another psalm. When the heart is writhing within, and tumultuous feelings are knocking at the door of the lips, the words will be troubled and heaped together, and dominant thoughts will repeat themselves in defiance of logical continuity. But, still, complaint and longing sound through the wailing, yearning notes of vv. 1–8; hot indignation and terrible imprecations in the stormy central portion (vv. 9–15); and a calmer

note of confidence and hope, through which, however, the former indignation surges up again, is audible in the closing verses (vv. 16–23).

The psalmist pictures his emotions in the first part, with but one reference to their cause, and but one verse of petition. He begins, indeed, with asking that his prayer may be heard; and it is well when a troubled heart can raise itself above the sea of troubles to stretch a hand towards God. Such an effort of faith already prophesies firm footing on the safe shore. But very pathetic and true to the experience of many a sorrowing heart is the psalmist's immediately subsequent dilating on his griefs. There is a dumb sorrow, and there is one which unpacks its heart in many words and knows not when to stop. The psalmist is *distracted* in his bitter brooding on his troubles. The word means to move restlessly, and may either apply to body or mind, perhaps to both; for Eastern demonstrativeness is not paralysed, but stimulated to bodily tokens, by sorrow. He can do nothing but groan or moan. His heart "writhes" in him. Like an avalanche, deadly terrors have fallen on him and crushed him. Fear and trembling have pierced into his inner being, and "horror" (a rare word, which the LXX. here renders *darkness*) wraps him round or covers him, as a cloak does. It is not so much the pressure of present evil, as the shuddering anticipation of a heavier storm about to burst, which is indicated by these pathetic expressions. The cause of them is stated in a single verse (3). "The voice of the enemy" rather than his hand is mentioned first, since threats and reproaches precede assaults; and it is budding, not full-blown, enmity which is in view. In ver. 3 *b* "oppression" is an imperfect parallelism with "voice," and the

conjectural emendation (which only requires the prefixing of a letter) of "cries," adopted by Cheyne, after Olshausen and others, is tempting. They "fling down iniquity" on him as rocks are hurled or rolled from a height on invaders—a phrase which recalls David's words to his servants, urging flight before Absalom, "lest he bring down evil upon us."

Then, from out of all this plaintive description of the psalmist's agitation and its causes, starts up that immortal strain which answers to the deepest longings of the soul, and has touched responsive chords in all whose lives are not hopelessly outward and superficial—the yearning for repose. It may be ignoble, or lofty and pure; it may mean only cowardice or indolence; but it is deepest in those who stand most unflinchingly at their posts, and crush it down at the command of duty. Unless a soul knows that yearning for a home in stillness, "afar from the sphere of our sorrow," it will remain a stranger to many high and noble things. The psalmist was moved to utter this longing by his painful consciousness of encompassing evils; but the longing is more than a desire for exemption from these. It is the cry of the homeless soul, which, like the dove from the ark, finds no resting-place in a world full of carrion, and would fain return whence it came. "O God, Thou hast made us for Thyself, and we are unquiet till we find rest in Thee." No obligation of duty keeps migratory birds in a land where winter is near. But men are better than birds, because they have other things to think of than repose, and must face, not flee, storms and hurricanes. It is better to have wings "like birds of tempest-loving kind," and to beat up against the wind, than to outfly it in retreat. So the psalmist's wish was but a wish; and he, like the

rest of us, had to stand to his post, or be tied to his stake, and let enemies and storms do their worst. The LXX. has a striking reading of ver. 8, which Cheyne has partially adopted. It reads for ver. 8 *a* "waiting for Him who saves me"; but beautiful as this is, as giving the picture of the restful fugitive in patient expectation, it brings an entirely new idea into the picture, and blends metaphor and fact confusedly. The Selah at the close of ver. 7 deepens the sense of still repose by a prolonged instrumental interlude.

The second part turns from subjective feelings to objective facts. A cry for help and a yearning for a safe solitude were natural results of the former; but when the psalmist's eye turns to his enemies, a flash of anger lights it, and, instead of the meek longings of the earlier verses, prayers for their destruction are vehemently poured out. The state of things in the city corresponds to what must have been the condition of Jerusalem during the incubation of Absalom's conspiracy, but is sufficiently general to fit any time of strained party feeling. The caldron simmers, ready to boil over. The familiar evils, of which so many psalms complain, are in full vigour. The psalmist enumerates them with a wealth of words which indicates their abundance. Violence, strife, iniquity, mischief, oppression, and deceit—a goodly company to patrol the streets and fill the open places of the city! Ver. 10 *a* is sometimes taken as carrying on the personification of Violence and Strife in ver. 9, by painting these as going their rounds on the walls, like sentries; but it is better to suppose that the actual foes are meant, and that they are keeping up a strict watch to prevent the psalmist's escape.

Several commentators consider that the burst of

indignation against the psalmist's traitorous friend in vv. 12–14 interrupts the sequence, and propose rearrangements by which vv. 20, 21, will be united with vv. 12–14, and placed either before ver. 6 or after ver. 15. But the very abruptness with which the thought of the traitor is interjected here, and in the subsequent reference to him, indicates how the singer's heart was oppressed by the treason; and the return to the subject in ver. 20 is equally significant of his absorbed and pained brooding on the bitter fact. That is a slight pain which is removed by one cry. Rooted griefs, overwhelming sorrows, demand many repetitions. Trouble finds ease in tautology. It is absurd to look for cool, logical sequence in such a heart's cry as this psalm. Smooth continuity would be most unnatural. The psalmist feels that the defection of his false friend is the worst blow of all. He could have braced himself to bear an enemy's reviling; he could have found weapons to repel, or a shelter in which to escape from, open foes; but the baseness which forgets all former sweet companionship in secret, and all association in public and in worship, is more than he can bear up against. The voice of wounded love is too plain in the words for the hypothesis that the singer is the personified nation. Traitors are too common to allow of a very confident affirmation that the psalm must point to Ahithophel, and the description of the perfidious friend as the *equal* of the psalmist does not quite fit that case.

As he thinks of all the sweetness of past intimacy, turned to gall by such dastardly treachery, his anger rises. The description of the city and of the one enemy in whom all its wickedness is, as it were, concentrated, is framed in a terrible circlet of prayers

for the destruction of the foes. Ver. 9*a* begins and ver. 15 ends this part with petitions which do not breathe the spirit of "Father, forgive them." There may be a reference to the confusion of tongues at Babel in the prayer of ver. 9. As then the impious work was stopped by mutual unintelligibility, so the psalmist desires that his enemies' machinations may be paralysed in like manner. In ver. 15 the translation "desolations" follows the Hebrew text, while the alternative and in some respects preferable reading "May death come suddenly" follows the Hebrew marginal correction. There are difficulties in both, and the correction does not so much smooth the language as to be obviously an improvement. The general sense is clear, whichever reading is preferred. The psalmist is calling down destruction on his enemies; and while the fact that he is in some manner an organ of the Divine purpose invests hostility to him with the darker character of rebellion against God, and therefore modifies the personal element in the prayer, it still remains a plain instance of the lower level on which the Old Testament saints and singers stood, when compared with the "least in the kingdom of heaven."

The third part of the psalm returns to gentler tones of devotion and trust. The great name of Jehovah appears here significantly. To that ever-living One, the Covenant God, will the psalmist cry, in assurance of answer. "Evening, and morning, and noon" designate the whole day by its three principal divisions, and mean, in effect, continually. Happy are they who are impelled to unintermitting prayer by the sight of unslumbering enmity! Enemies may go their rounds "day and night," but they will do little harm, if the poor, hunted man, whom they watch so closely, lifts

his cries to Heaven "evening, and morning, and noon." The psalmist goes back to his first words. He had begun by saying that he was distracted as he mused, and could do nothing but groan, and in ver. 17 he repeats that he will still do so. Has he, then, won nothing by his prayer but the prolongation of his first dreary tone of feeling? He has won this—that his musing is not accompanied by distraction, and that his groaning is not involuntary expression of pain, but articulate prayer, and therefore accompanied by the confidence of being heard. Communion with God and prayerful trust in his help do not at once end sadness and sobbing, but do change their character and lighten the blackness of grief. This psalmist, like so many of his fellows, realises deliverance before he experiences it, and can sing "He has redeemed my soul" even while the calamity lasts. "They come not near me," says he. A soul hidden in God has an invisible defence which repels assaults. As with a man in a diving-bell, the sea may press on the crystal walls, but cannot crush them in or enter, and there is safe, dry lodging inside, while sea billows and monsters are without, close to the diver and yet far from him.

Ver. 19 is full of difficulty, and most probably has suffered some textual corruption. To "hear and answer" is uniformly an expression for gracious hearing and beneficent answering. Here it can only mean the opposite, or must be used ironically. God will hear the enemies' threats, and will requite them. Various expedients have been suggested for removing the difficulty. It has been proposed to read "me" for "them," which would bring everything into order—only that, then, the last clauses of the verse, which begin with a relative ("who have no changes," etc.), would

want an antecedent. It has been proposed to read "will humble them" for "will answer them," which is the LXX. translation. That requires a change in the vowels of the verb, and "answer" is more probable than "humble" after "hear." Cheyne follows Olshausen in supposing that "the cry of the afflicted" has dropped out after "hear." The construction of ver. 19*b* is anomalous, as the clause is introduced by a superfluous "and," which may be a copyist's error. The Selah attached is no less anomalous. It is especially difficult to explain, in view of the relative which begins the third clause, and which would otherwise be naturally brought into close connection with the "them," the objects of the verbs in *a*. These considerations lead Hupfeld to regard ver. 19 as properly ending with Selah, and the remaining clauses as out of place, and properly belonging to ver. 15 or 18; while Cheyne regards the alternative supposition that they are a fragment of another psalm as possible. There is probably some considerable corruption of the text, not now to be remedied; but the existing reading is at least capable of explanation and defence. The principal difficulty in the latter part of ver. 19 is the meaning of the word rendered "changes." The persons spoken of are those whom God will hear and answer in His judicial character, in which He has been throned from of old. Their not having "changes" is closely connected with their not fearing God. The word is elsewhere used for changes of raiment, or for the relief of military guards. Calvin and others take the changes intended to be vicissitudes of fortune, and hence draw the true thought that unbroken prosperity tends to forgetfulness of God. Others take the changes to be those of mind

or conduct from evil to good, while others fall back upon the metaphor of relieving guard, which they connect with the picture in ver. 10 of the patrols on the walls, so getting the meaning "they have no cessation in their wicked watchfulness." It must be acknowledged that none of these meanings is quite satisfactory; but probably the first, which expresses the familiar thought of the godlessness attendant on uninterrupted prosperity, is best.

Then follows another reference to the traitorous friend, which, by its very abruptness, declares how deep is the wound he has inflicted. The psalmist does not stand alone. He classes with himself those who remained faithful to him. The traitor has not yet thrown off his mask, though the psalmist has penetrated his still retained disguise. He comes with smooth words; but, in the vigorous language of ver. 21, "his heart is war." The fawning softness of words known to be false cuts into the heart, which had trusted and knows itself betrayed, more sharply than keen steel.

Ver. 22 has been singularly taken as the smooth words which cut so deep; but surely that is a very strained interpretation. Much rather does the psalmist exhort himself and all who have the same bitterness to taste, to commit themselves to Jehovah. What is it which he exhorts us to cast on Him? The word employed is used here only, and its meaning is therefore questionable. The LXX. and others translate "care." Others, relying on Talmudical usage, prefer "burden," which is appropriate to the following promise of being held erect. Others (Hupfeld, etc.) would read "that which He has given thee." The general sense is clear, and the faith expressed in both exhortation and

appended promise has been won by the singer through his prayer. He is counselling and encouraging himself. The spirit has to spur the "soul" to heroisms of faith and patience. He is declaring a universal truth. However crushing our loads of duty or of sorrow, we receive strength to carry them with straight backs, if we cast them on Jehovah. The promise is not that He will take away the pressure, but that He will hold us up under it; and, similarly, the last clause declares that the righteous will not be allowed to stumble. Faith is mentioned before righteousness. The two must go together; for trust which is not accompanied and manifested by righteousness is no true trust, and righteousness which is not grounded in trust is no stable or real righteousness.

The last verse sums up the diverse fates of the "men of blood and deceit" and of the psalmist. The terrible prayers of the middle portion of the psalm have wrought the assurance of their fulfilment, just as the cries of faith have brought the certainty of theirs. So the two closing verses of the psalm turn both parts of the earlier petitions into prophecies; and over against the trustful, righteous psalmist, standing erect and unmoved, there is set the picture of the "man of blood and deceit," chased down the black slopes to the depths of destruction by the same God whose hand holds up the man that trusts in Him. It is a dreadful contrast, and the spirit of the whole psalm is gathered into it. The last clause of all makes "I" emphatic. It expresses the final resolution which springs in the singer's heart in view of that dread picture of destruction and those assurances of support. He recoils from the edge of the pit, and eagerly opens his bosom for the promised blessing. Well for us

if the upshot of all our meditations on the painful riddle of this unintelligible world, and of all our burdens and of all our experiences and of our observation of other men's careers, is the absolute determination, "As for me, I will trust in Jehovah!"

PSALM LVI.

1 Be gracious to me, O God; for man would swallow me up:
All day the fighting oppresses me.
2 My liers-in-wait would swallow me up all the day:
For many proudly fight against me.
3 [In] the day [when] I fear,
I will trust in Thee.
4 In God do I praise His word:
In God do I trust, I will not fear;
What can flesh do to me?

5 All day they wrest my words;
All their thoughts are against me for evil.
6 They gather together, they set spies,
They mark my steps,
Even as they have waited for my soul.
7 Shall there be escape for them because of iniquity?
In anger cast down the peoples, O God.
8 My wanderings hast Thou reckoned:
Put Thou my tears into Thy bottle;
Are they not in Thy reckoning?
9 Then shall my enemies turn back in the day [when] I call:
This I know, that God is for me (*or* mine).
10 In God will I praise the word:
In Jehovah will I praise the word.
11 In God have I trusted, I will not fear;
What can man do to me?

12 Upon me, O God, are Thy vows:
I will requite praises to Thee.
13 For Thou hast delivered my soul from death:
Hast Thou not delivered my feet from stumbling?
That I may walk before God in the light of the living.

THE superscription dates this psalm from the time of David's being in Gath. Probably his first stay there is meant, during which he had recourse to

feigned insanity in order to secure his safety. What a contrast between the seeming idiot scrabbling on the walls and the saintly singer of this lovely song of purest trust! But striking as the contrast is, it is not too violent to be possible. Such heroic faith might lie very near such employment of pardonable dissimulation, even if the two moods of feeling can scarcely have been contemporaneous. Swift transitions characterise the poetic temperament; and, alas! fluctuations of courage and faith characterise the devout soul. Nothing in the psalm specially suggests the date assigned in the superscription; but, as we have already had occasion to remark, that may be an argument for, not against, the correctness of the superscription.

The psalm is simple in structure. Like others ascribed to David during the Sauline period, it has a refrain, which divides it into two parts; but these are of substantially the same purport, with the difference that the second part enlarges the description of the enemies' assaults, and rises to confident anticipation of their defeat. In that confidence the singer adds a closing expression of thankfulness for the deliverance already realised in faith.

The first part begins with that significant contrast which is the basis of all peaceful fronting of a hostile world or any evil. On one side stands man, whose very name here suggests feebleness, and on the other is God. "Man" in ver. 1 is plainly a collective. The psalmist masses the foes, whom he afterwards individualises and knows only too well to be a multitude, under that generic appellation, which brings out their inherent frailty. Be they ever so many, still they all belong to the same class, and an infinite number of nothings only sums up into nothing. The Divine Unit

is more than all these. The enemy is said to "pant after" the psalmist, as a wild beast open-mouthed and ready to devour; or, according to others, the word means to *crush*. The thing meant by the strong metaphor is given in ver. 1 *b*. 2; namely, the continual hostile activity of the foe. The word rendered "proudly" is literally "on high," and Baethgen suggests that the literal meaning should be retained. He supposes that the antagonists "held an influential position in a princely court." Even more literally the word may describe the enemies as occupying a post of vantage, from which they shower down missiles.

One brief verse, the brevity of which gives it emphasis, tells of the singer's fears, and of how he silences them by the dead lift of effort by which he constrains himself to trust. It is a strangely shallow view which finds a contradiction in this utterance, which all hearts, that have ever won calmness in agitation and security amid encompassing dangers by the same means, know to correspond to their own experience. If there is no fear, there is little trust. The two do co-exist. The eye that takes in only visible facts on the earthly level supplies the heart with abundant reasons for fear. But it rests with ourselves whether we shall yield to those, or whether, by lifting our eyes higher and fixing the vision on the Unseen and on Him who is invisible, we shall call such an ally to our side as shall make fear and doubt impossible. We have little power of directly controlling fear or any other feeling, but we can determine the objects on which we shall fix attention. If we choose to look at "man," we shall be unreasonable if we do not fear; if we choose to look at God, we shall be more unreasonable if we do not trust. The one antagonist of fear is

faith. Trust is a voluntary action for which we are responsible.

The frequent use of the phrase "In the day when" is noticeable. It occurs in each verse of the first part, excepting the refrain. The antagonists are continually at work, and the psalmist, on his part, strives to meet their machinations and to subdue his own fears with as continuous a faith. The phrase recurs in the second part in a similar connection. Thus, then, the situation as set forth in the first part has three elements,—the busy malice of the foes; the effort of the psalmist, his only weapon against them, to hold fast his confidence; and the power and majesty of God, who will be gracious when besought. The refrain gathers up these three in a significantly different order. The preceding verses arranged them thus—God, man, the trusting singer. The refrain puts them thus—God, the trusting singer, man. When the close union between a soul and God is clearly seen and inwardly felt, the importance of the enemies dwindles. When faith is in the act of springing up, God, the refuge, and man, the source of apprehension, stand over against each other, and the suppliant, looking on both, draws near to God. But when faith has fruited, the believing soul is coupled so closely to the Divine Object of its faith, that He and it are contemplated as joined in blessed reciprocity of protection and trust, and enemies are in an outer region, where they cannot disturb its intercourse with its God. The order of thought in the refrain is also striking. First, the singer praises God's word. By God's gracious help he knows that he will receive the fulfilment of God's promises (not necessarily any special "word," such as the promise of a throne to David). And then, on the experience of

God's faithfulness thus won, is reared a further structure of trust, which completely subdues fear. This is the reward of the effort after faith which the psalmist made. He who begins with determining not to fear will get such tokens of God's troth that fear will melt away like a cloud, and he will find his sky cleared, as the nightly heavens are swept free of cloud-rack by the meek moonlight.

The second part covers the same ground. Trust, like love, never finds it grievous to write the same things. There is delight, and there is strengthening for the temper of faith, in repeating the contemplation of the earthly facts which make it necessary, and the super-sensuous facts which make it blessed. A certain expansion of the various parts of the theme, as compared with the first portion of the psalm, is obvious. Again the phrase "all the day" occurs in reference to the unwearying hostility which dogs the singer. "They wrest my words" may be, as Cheyne prefers, "They torture me with words." That rendering would supply a standing feature of the class of psalms to which this belongs. The furtive assembling, the stealthy setting of spies who watch his steps (lit. *heels*, as ready to spring on him from behind), are no new things, but are in accordance with what has long been the enemies' practice.

Ver. 7 brings in a new element not found in the first part—namely, the prayer for the destruction of these unwearied watchers. Its first clause is obscure. If the present text is adhered to, the rendering of the clause as a question is best. A suggested textual correction has been largely adopted by recent commentators, which by a very slight alteration gives the meaning "For their iniquity requite them." The

alteration, however, is not necessary, and the existing text may be retained, though the phrase is singular. The introduction of a prayer for a world-wide judgment in the midst of so intensely individual a psalm is remarkable, and favours the theory that the afflicted man of the psalm is really the nation; but it may be explained on the ground that, as in Psalm vii. 8, the judgment on behalf of one man is contemplated as only one smaller manifestation of the same judicial activity which brings about the universal judgment. This single reference to the theme which fills so considerable a part of the other psalms of this class is in harmony with the whole tone of this gem of quiet faith, which is too much occupied with the blessedness of its own trust to have many thoughts of the end of others. It passes, therefore, quickly, to dwell on yet another phase of that blessedness.

The tender words of ver. 8 need little elucidation. They have brought comfort to many, and have helped to dry many tears. How the psalmist presses close to God, and how sure he is of His gentle care and love! "Thou reckonest my wandering." The thought is remarkable, both in its realisation of God's individualising relation to the soul that trusts Him, and as in some degree favouring the Davidic authorship. The hunted fugitive feels that every step of his weary interlacing tracks, as he stole from point to point as danger dictated, was known to God. The second clause of the verse is thought by prosaic commentators to interrupt the sequence, because it interjects a petition between two statements; but surely nothing is more natural than such an "interruption." What a lovely figure is that of God's treasuring up His servants' tears in His "bottle," the skin in which

liquids were kept! What does He keep them for? To show how precious they are in His sight, and perhaps to suggest that they are preserved for a future use. The tears that His children shed and give to Him to keep cannot be tears of rebellious or unmeasured weeping, and will be given back one day to those who shed them, converted into refreshment, by the same Power which of old turned water into wine.

> "Think not thou canst weep a tear,
> And thy Maker is not near."

Not only in order to minister retribution to those who inflicted them, but also in order to give recompense of gladness to weepers, are these tears preserved by God; and the same idea is repeated by the other metaphor of ver. 8 *c*. God's book, or reckoning, contains the count of all the tears as well as wanderings of His servant. The certainty that it is so is expressed by the interrogative form of the clause.

The "then" of ver. 9 may be either temporal or logical. It may mean "things being so," or "in consequence of this," or it may mean "at the time when," and may refer to the further specification of period in the next clause. That same day which has already been designated as that of the enemies' panting after the psalmist's life, and wresting of his words, and, on the other hand, as that of his fear, is now the time of his prayer, and consequently of their defeat and flight. The confidence which struggled with fear in the closing words of the first part, is now consolidated into certain knowledge that God is on the singer's side, and in a very deep sense belongs to him. This is the foundation of his hope

of deliverance; and in this clear knowledge he chants once more his refrain. As is often the case, slight differences, mainly due to artistic love of variety in uniformity, occur in the repeated refrain. "Word" stands instead of "His word"; "man," instead of "flesh"; and a line is intercalated, in which Jehovah is substituted for God. The addition may be a later interpolation, but is probably part of the original text, and due to the same intelligible motives which prompted the occasional use of the great Covenant Name in the Elohistic psalms of this second book.

The psalmist's exuberant confidence overflows the limits of his song, in a closing couple of verses which are outside its scheme. So sure is he of deliverance, that, as often in similar psalms, his thoughts are busied in preparing his sacrifice of thanks before the actual advent of the mercy for which it is to be offered. Such swift-footed Gratitude is the daughter of very vivid Faith. The ground of the thankoffering is deliverance of "the soul," for which foes have "waited." "Thou hast delivered" is a perfect tense expressing confidence in the certainty of the as yet unrealised exercise of God's power. The question of ver. 13 *b*, like that of ver. 8 *c* (and perhaps that of ver. 7 *a*), is an emphatic affirmation, and the verb to be supplied is not "Wilt thou?" as the A.V. has it, but, as is plain from the context, and from the quotation of this verse in Psalm cxvi. 8, "Hast thou?" The Divine deliverance is complete,—not only doing the greater, but also the less; and not barely saving life, but sustaining the steps. God does not rescue by halves, either in the natural or spiritual realm; but in the former He first rescues and next preserves, and in the latter He delivers from the true death of the spirit, and then inspires to glad

obedience. The psalm crowns its celebration of God's miracles of deliverance by declaring the aim of them all to be that their recipient may walk before God—*i.e.*, in continual consciousness of His cognisance of his deeds, and "in the light of the living" or "of life." The expression seems here to mean simply the present life, as contrasted with the darkness and inactivity of Sheol; but we can scarcely help remembering the deeper meaning given to it by Him who said that to follow Him was to have the light of life. Whether any dim foreboding of a better light than streams from even an Eastern sun, and of a truer life than the vain shadow which men call by that august name, floated before the singer or not, we can thankfully interpret his words, so as to make them the utterance of the Christian consciousness that the ultimate design of all God's deliverances of souls from death and of feet from falling is that, not only in ways of holiness here, but in the more perfect consciousness of His greater nearness hereafter, and in correspondingly increased perfectness of active service, we should walk before God in the light of the living.

PSALM LVII

1 Be gracious to me, O God, be gracious to me;
For in Thee has my soul taken refuge:
And in the shadow of Thy wings will I take refuge,
Until the [tempest of] destructions is gone by.
2 I will cry to God Most High;
To God who accomplishes for me.
3 He will send from heaven, and save me;
[For] He that would swallow me up blasphemes. Selah.
God shall send His Loving-kindness and His Troth.
4 My soul is among lions;
I must lie down among those who breathe out fire—
Sons of men, whose teeth are spear and arrows,
Their tongue a sharp sword.
5 Exalt Thyself above the heavens, O God,
Above all the earth Thy glory.

6 A net have they prepared for my steps;
They have bowed down my soul:
They have digged before me a pit;
They have fallen into the midst of it. Selah.
7 Steadfast is my heart, O God, steadfast is my heart:
I will sing and harp.
8 Awake, my glory; awake, harp and lute:
I will wake the dawn.
9 I will give Thee thanks among the peoples, O Lord:
I will harp to Thee among the nations.
10 For great unto the heavens is Thy Loving-kindness,
And unto the clouds Thy Troth.
11 Exalt Thyself above the heavens, O God,
Above all the earth Thy glory.

THIS psalm resembles the preceding in the singer's circumstances of peril and in his bold faith. It has also points of contact in the cry, "Be gracious,"

and in the remarkable expression for enemies, "Those that would swallow me up." It has also several features in common with the other psalms ascribed by the superscriptions to the time of the Sauline persecution. Like Psalm vii. are the metaphor of *lions* for enemies, that of *digging a pit* for their plots, the use of *glory* as a synonym for soul. The difficult word rendered "destructions" in ver. 1 connects this psalm with Psalm lv. 11, dated as belonging to the time of Saul's hostility, and with Psalms v. 9 and xxxviii. 12, both traditionally Davidic. There is nothing in the psalm against the attribution of it to David in the cave, whether of Adullam or Engedi, and the allusions to lying down among lions may possibly have been suggested by the wild beasts prowling round the psalmist's shelter. The use in ver. 1 of the picturesque word for taking refuge derives special appropriateness from the circumstances of the fugitive, over whose else defenceless head the sides of his cave arched themselves like great wings, beneath which he lay safe, though the growls of beasts of prey echoed round. But there is no need to seek for further certainty as to the occasion of the psalm. Baethgen thinks that it can only have been composed after "the annihilation of the independence of the Israelite state," because the vow in ver. 9 to make God's name known among the nations can only be the utterance of the oppressed congregation, which is sure of deliverance, because it is conscious of its Divine call to sing God's praise to heathens. But that vow is equally explicable on the assumption that the individual singer was conscious of such a call.

There is no very sharp division of parts in the psalm. A grand refrain separates it into two portions, in the

former of which prayer for deliverance and contemplation of dangers prevail, while in the latter the foe is beheld as already baffled, and exuberant praise is poured forth and vowed.

As in Psalm liv. and often, the first part begins with an act of faith reaching out to God, and strengthening itself by the contemplation of His character and acts. That energy of confidence wins assurance of help, and only after that calming certitude has filled the soul does the psalmist turn his eye directly on his enemies. His faith does not make him oblivious of his danger, but it minimises his dread. An eye that has seen God sees little terror in the most terrible things.

The psalmist knows that a soul which trusts has a right to God's gracious dealings, and he is not afraid to urge his confidence as a plea with God. The boldness of the plea is not less indicative of the depth and purity of his religious experience than are the tender metaphors in which it is expressed. What truer or richer description of trust could be given than that which likens it to the act of a fugitive betaking himself to the shelter of some mountain fastness, impregnable and inaccessible? What lovelier thought of the safe, warm hiding-place which God affords was ever spoken than that of "the shadow of Thy wings"? Very significant is the recurrence of the same verb in two different tenses in two successive clauses (1 *b*, *c*). The psalmist heartens himself for present and future trust by remembrance of past days, when he exercised it and was not put to shame That faith is blessed, and cannot but be strong, which is nurtured by the remembrance of past acts of rewarded faith, as the leaves of bygone summers make rich mould for a new generation of flowers. When kites are in the sky, young birds seek

protection from the mother's wing as well as warmth from her breast. So the singer betakes himself to his shelter till "destructions are gone by." Possibly these are likened to a wild storm which sweeps across the land, but is not felt in the stillness of the cave fortress. Hidden in God, a man "heareth not the loud winds when they call," and may solace himself in the midst of their roar by the thought that they will soon blow over. He will not cease to take refuge in God when the stress is past, nor throw off his cloak when the rain ceases; but he will nestle close while it lasts, and have as his reward the clear certainty of its transiency. The faith which clings to God after the tempest is no less close than that which screened itself in Him while it raged.

Hidden in his shelter, the psalmist, in ver. 2, tells himself the grounds on which he may be sure that his cry to God will not be in vain. His name is "Most High," and His elevation is the pledge of His irresistible might. He is the "God" (the Strong) who accomplishes all for the psalmist which he needs, and His past manifestations in that character make His future interventions certain. Therefore the singer is sure of what will happen. Two bright angels—Loving-kindness and Troth or Faithfulness their names—will be despatched from heaven for the rescue of the man who has trusted. That is certain, because of what God is and has done. It is no less certain, because of what the psalmist is and has done; for a soul that gazes on God as its sole Helper, and has pressed, in its feebleness, close beneath these mighty pinions, cannot but bring down angel helpers, the executants of God's love.

The confidence expressed in ver. 2 is interrupted by an abrupt glance at the enemy. "He that would swallow me up blasphemes" is the most probable

rendering of a difficult phrase, the meaning and connection of which are both dubious. If it is so rendered, the connection is probably that which we have expressed in the translation by inserting "For." The wish to destroy the psalmist is itself blasphemy, or is accompanied with blasphemy; and therefore God will surely send down what will bring it to nought. The same identification of his own cause with God's, which marks many of the psalms ascribed to the persecuted David, underlies this sudden reference to the enemy, and warrants the conclusion drawn, that help will come. The Selah at the end of the clause is unusual in the middle of a verse; but it may be intended to underscore, as it were, the impiety of the enemy, and so corresponds with the other Selah in ver. 6, which is also in an unusual place, and points attention to the enemy's ruin, as this does to his wickedness.

The description of the psalmist's circumstances in ver. 4 presents considerable difficulty. The division of clauses, the force of the form of the verb rendered *I must lie down*, and the meaning and construction of the word rendered "those who breathe out fire," are all questionable. If the accents are adhered to, the first clause of the verse is "My soul is among lions." That is by some—*e.g.*, Delitzsch—regarded as literal description of the psalmist's environment, but it is more natural to suppose that he is applying a familiar metaphor to his enemies. In v. 4*b* the verb rendered above "I must lie down" is in a form which has usually a cohortative or optative force, and is by some supposed to have that meaning here, and to express trust which is willing to lie down even in a lion's den. It seems, however, here to denote objective necessity rather than subjective willingness. Hupfeld would read *lies down* (third

person), thus making "My soul" the subject of the verb, and getting rid of the difficult optative form. Cheyne suggests a further slight alteration in the word, so as to read. "My soul hath dwelt"—a phrase found in Psalm cxx. 6; and this emendation is tempting. The word rendered "those who breathe out fire" is by some taken to mean "those who devour," and is variously construed, as referring to the *lions* in *a*, taken literally, or as describing the *sons of men* in *c*. The general drift of the verse is clear. The psalmist is surrounded by enemies, whom he compares, as the Davidic psalms habitually do, to wild beasts. They are ready to rend. Open-mouthed they seem to breathe out flames, and their slanders cut like swords.

The psalmist's contemplation of his forlorn lair among men worse than beasts of prey drives him back to realise again his refuge in God. He, as it were, wrenches his mind round to look at God rather than at the enemies. Clear perception of peril and weakness does its best work, when it drives to as clear recognition of God's help, and wings faithful prayer. The psalmist, in his noble refrain, has passed beyond the purely personal aspect of the desired deliverance, and wishes not only that he may be shielded from his foes, but that God would, in that deliverance, manifest Himself in His elevation above and power over all created things. To conceive of his experience as thus contributing to God's world-wide glory seems presumptuous; but even apart from the consideration that the psalmist was conscious of a world-wide mission, the lowliest suppliant has a right to feel that his deliverance will enhance the lustre of that Glory; and the lowlier he feels himself, the more wonderful is its manifestations in his well-being. But if there is a strange note in the

apparent audacity of this identification, there is a deep one of self-suppression in the fading from the psalmist's prayer of all mention of himself, and the exclusive contemplation of the effects on the manifestation of God's character, which may follow his deliverance. It is a rare and lofty attainment to regard one's own well-being mainly in its connection with God's "glory," and to desire the latter more consciously and deeply than the former.

It has been proposed by Hupfeld to transpose vv. 5, 6, on the ground that a recurrence to the description of dangers is out of place after the refrain, and incongruous with the tone of the second part of the psalm. But do the psalmists observe such accuracy in the flow of their emotions? and is it not natural for a highly emotional lyric like this to allow some surge of feeling to run over its barriers? The reference to the enemies in ver. 6 is of a triumphant sort, which naturally prepares for the burst of praise following, and worthily follows even the lyrical elevation of the refrain. The perfects seem at first sight to refer to past deliverances, which the psalmist recalls in order to assure himself of future ones. But this retrospective reference is not necessary, and the whole description in ver. 6 is rather to be taken as that of approaching retribution on the foes, which is so certain to come that the singer celebrates it as already as good as done. The familiar figures of the net and pit, by both of which wild animals are caught, and the as familiar picture of the hunter trapped in his own pitfall, need no elucidation. There is a grim irony of events, which often seems to delight in showing "the engineer hoised with his own petard"; and whether that spectacle is forthcoming or not, the automatic effects of wrongdoing always follow, and no

man digs pits for others but somehow and somewhen he finds himself at the bottom of them, and his net wrapped round his own limbs. The Selah at the end of ver. 6 calls spectators to gather, as it were, round the sight of the ensnared plotter, lying helpless down there. A slight correction of the text does away with a difficulty in ver. 6 *b*. The verb there is transitive, and in the existing text is in the singular, but "He has bowed down my soul" would be awkward, though not impossible, when coming between two clauses in which the enemies are spoken of in the plural. The emendation of the verb to the third person plural by the addition of a letter brings the clauses into line, and retains the usual force of the verb.

The psalmist has done with the enemies; they are at the bottom of the pit. In full confidence of triumph and deliverance, he breaks out into a grand burst of praise. "My heart is fixed," or "steadfast." Twice the psalmist repeats this, as he does other emphatic thoughts, in this psalm (*cp.* vv. 2, 4, 8, 9). What power can steady that fluttering, wayward, agitated thing, a human heart? The way to keep light articles fixed on deck, amidst rolling seas and howling winds, is to lash them to something fixed; and the way to steady a heart is to bind it to God. Built into the Rock, the building partakes of the steadfastness of its foundation. Knit to God, a heart is firm. The psalmist's was steadfast because it had taken refuge in God; and so, even before his rescue from his enemies came to pass, he was emancipated from the fear of them, and could lift this song of praise. He had said that he must lie down among lions. But wherever his bed may be, he is sure that he will rise from it; and however dark the night, he is sure that a morning will come. In a bold and

beautiful figure he says that he will "wake the dawn" with his song.

The world-wide destination of his praise is clear to him. It is plain that such anticipations as those of ver. 9 surpass the ordinary poetic consciousness, and must be accounted for on some special ground. The favourite explanation at present is that the singer is Israel, conscious of its mission. The old explanation that the singer is a king, conscious of his inspiration and divinely given office, equally meets the case

The psalmist had declared his trust that God would send out His angels of Loving-kindness and Troth. He ends his song with the conviction, which has become to him matter of experience, that these Divine "attributes" tower to heaven, and in their height symbolise their own infinitude. Nor is the other truth suggested by ver. 10 to be passed over, that the manifestation of these attributes on earth leads to their being more gloriously visible in heaven. These two angels, who come forth from on high to do God's errands for His poor, trusting servant, go back, their work done, and are hailed as victors by the celestial inhabitants. By God's manifestation of these attributes to a man, His glory is exalted above the heavens and all the earth. The same thought is more definitely expressed in Paul's declaration that "to the principalities and powers in heavenly places is known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God."

PSALM LVIII.

1 Do ye indeed speak righteousness, O ye gods?
In uprightness do ye judge the sons of men?
2 Yea, in heart ye work iniquity;
In the earth ye weigh out the violence of your hands.
3 The wicked are estranged from the womb:
Gone astray from birth are the speakers of lies.
4 Their poison is like the poison of a serpent,
Like the deaf adder that stops its ear,
5 That will not hearken to the voice of the charmers,
The skilled weaver of spells.

6 O God, break their teeth in their mouth:
The grinders of the young lions wrench out, Jehovah.
7 Let them melt like waters [that] run themselves [dry]:
[When] he shoots his arrows, let them be as if pointless.
8 [Let them be] as a slug that dissolves as it crawls:
As the premature birth of a woman, [that] has not seen the sun.
9 Before your pots feel the thorns,
Whether it be green or burning, He shall whirl it away.

10 The righteous shall rejoice that he has beheld [the] vengeance:
His footsteps shall he bathe in the blood of the wicked.
11 And men shall say, Surely there is fruit for the righteous:
Surely there is a God judging in the earth.

THIS psalmist's fiery indignation against unjust judges and evil-doers generally is not kindled by personal wrongs. The psalm comes hot from a heart lacerated by the sight of widespread corruption, and constrained to seek for patience in the thought of the swift sweeping away of evil men before their plans are effected. Stern triumph in the punitive manifestations of God's

rule, and keen sense of the need of such, are its key-notes. Vehement emotion stirs the poet's imagination to heap together strong and, in part, obscure metaphors. Here emphatically "Indignatio facit versus." The psalm is Dantesque in its wealth of sombre imagination, which produces the most solemn effects with the homeliest metaphors, and in its awed and yet satisfied contemplation of the fate of evil-doers. It parts itself into three portions,—a dark picture of abounding evil (vv. 1–5); its punishment prayed for (vv. 6–9); and the consequent joy of the righteous and widespread recognition of the rule of a just God (vv. 10, 11).

The abrupt question of ver. 1 speaks of long pent-up indignation, excited by protracted experience of injustice, and anticipates the necessary negative answer which follows. The word rendered by the A.V. and R.V. "in silence" or "dumb" can scarcely be twisted into intelligibility, and the small alteration of reading required for the rendering "gods" is recommended by the similar expressions in the kindred Psalm lxxxii. Taken thus, the question is hurled at the appointed depositaries of judicial power and supreme authority. There is no need to suppose, with Hupfeld and others, whom Cheyne follows, that these "gods" are supernatural beings intrusted with the government of the world. The explanation of the name lies in the conception of such power as bestowed by God, and in some sense a delegation of His attribute; or, as our Lord explained the similar name in Psalm lxxxii., as given because "to them the word of God came." It sets in sinister light the flagrant contradiction between the spirit in which these men exercised their office and the source from which they derived it, and thus sharpens the reproach of the question. The answer is

introduced by a particle conveying a strong opposition to the previous supposition couched in the question. "Heart" and "hands" are so obviously antithetical, that the alteration of "in heart" to "ye all" is not acceptable, though it removes the incongruity of plans being wrought in the heart, the seat of devices, not of actions. "Work" may be here used anomalously, as we say "work out," implying the careful preparation of a plan, and there may even be a hint that the true acts are the undone acts of the heart. The unaccomplished purpose is a deed, though never clothed in outward fact. Evil determined is, in a profound sense, done before it is done; and, in another equally solemn, not done when "'tis done," as Macbeth has taught us. The "act," as men call it, follows: "In the earth"—not only in the heart—"ye weigh out the violence of your hands." The scales of justice are untrue. Instead of dispensing equity, as they were bound to do, they clash into the balance the weight of their own violence.

It is to be noted that the psalm says no more about the sins of unjust authorities, but passes on to describe the "wicked" generally. The transition may suggest that under unjust rulers all wrongdoers find impunity, and so multiply and worsen; or it may simply be that these former are now merged in the class to which they belong. The type of "wickedness" gibbeted is the familiar one of malicious calumniators and persecutors. From birth onwards they have continuously been doers of evil. The psalmist is not laying down theological propositions about heredity, but describing the inveterate habit of sin which has become a second nature, and makes amendment hopeless. The reference to "lies" naturally suggests the image of the serpent's poison. An envenomed tongue is worse than any

snake's bite. And the mention of the serpent stimulates the poet's imagination to yet another figure, which puts most graphically that disregard of warnings, entreaties, and every voice, human or Divine, that marks long-practised, customary sinfulness. There can be no more striking symbol of determined disregard to the calls of patient Love and the threats of outraged Justice than that of the snake lying coiled, with its head in the centre of its motionless folds, as if its ears were stopped by its own bulk, while the enchanter plays his softest notes and speaks his strongest spells in vain. There are such men, thinks this psalmist. There are none whom the mightiest spell, that of God's love in Christ, could not conquer and free from their poison; but there are such as will close their ears to its plaintive sweetness. This is the condemnation that light is come and men love darkness, and had rather lie coiled in their holes than have their fangs extracted.

The general drift of the second part (vv. 6–9) is to call down Divine retribution on these obstinate, irreclaimable evil-doers. Figure is heaped on figure in a fashion suggestive of intense emotion. The transiency of insolent evil, the completeness of its destruction, are the thoughts common to them all. There are difficulties in translation, and, in ver. 9, probable textual corruption; but these should not hide the tremendous power of gloomy imagination, which can lay hold of vulgar and in part loathsome things, and, by sheer force of its own solemn insight, can free them from all low or grotesque associations, and turn them into awful symbols. The intense desire for the sweeping away of evil-doers has met us in many previous psalms, and it is needless to repeat former observations on it. But it is nowhere expressed with

such a wealth of metaphor as here. The first of these, that of crushing the jaws and breaking the teeth of a beast of prey, occurs also in Psalm iii. 7. It is less terrible than the subsequent imprecations, since it only contemplates the wickeds' deprivation of power to do harm. In ver. 7 *a* their destruction is sought, while, in the second clause of the same verse, the defeat of their attempts is desired. Ver. 8 then expands the former wish, and ver. 9 the latter. This plain symmetrical arrangement makes the proposals to resort to transposition unnecessary. Mountain torrents quickly run themselves dry; and the more furious their rush, the swifter their exhaustion. They leave a chaos of whitened stones, that lie bleaching in the fierce sun when the wild spate is past. So stormy and so short will be the career of evil-doers. So could a good man of old wish it to be; and so may we be sure of and desire the cessation of oppression and man's inhumanity to man. Ver. 7 *b* is obscure. All these figures are struck out with such parsimony of words that they are difficult. They remind one of some of the stern, unfinished work of Michael Angelo, where a blow or two of his chisel, or a dash or two of his brush, has indicated rather than expressed his purpose, and left a riddle, fascinating in its incompleteness, for smaller men to spell out. In ver. 7 *b* it may be asked, Who is the archer? If God, then the whole is a presentation as if of an occurrence taking place before our eyes. God shoots His arrow, and at once it lodges in the heart of the enemies, and they are as though cut off. But it is better to take the wicked as the subject of both verbs, the change from singular to plural being by no means unusual in successive clauses with the same subject. If so, this clause recurs to the thought of

ver. 6, and prays for the neutralising of the wicked man's attempts. He fits his arrows, aims, and draws the bow. May they fall harmless, as if barbless! An emendation has been proposed by which the clause is made parallel with Psalm xxxvii. 2, "As grass let them be quickly cut off," thus securing a complete parallel with *a*, and avoiding the difficulty in the word rendered by us "pointless." But the existing text gives a vigorous metaphor, the peculiarity of which makes it preferable to the feebler image of withering grass.

The prayer for destruction is caught up again in ver. 8, in two daring figures which tremble on the verge of lowering the key of the whole; but by escaping that peril, produce the contrary effect, and heighten it. A slug leaves a shining track of slime as it creeps, which exudes from its soft body, and thus it seems to disintegrate itself by its own motion. It is the same thought of the suicidal character of bad men's efforts which was expressed by the stream foaming itself away in the nullah. It is the eternal truth that opposition to God's will destroys itself by its own activity. The unfulfilled life of a premature birth, with eyes which never opened to the light for which they were made, and possibilities which never unfolded, and which is huddled away into a nameless grave, still more impressively symbolises futility and transiency.

In ver. 9 the figure has given much trouble to commentators. Its broad meaning is, however, undoubted. It is, as ver. 6 and ver. 7 *b*, symbolic of the Divine intervention which wrecks wicked men's plans before they are wrought out. The picture before the psalmist seems to be that of a company of travellers round their camp fire, preparing their meal. They heap brushwood under the pot, and expect to satisfy their hunger;

but before the pot is warmed through, not to say before the water boils or the meat is cooked, down comes a whirlwind, which sweeps away fire, pot, and all. Every word of the clause is doubtful, and, with the existing text, the best that can be done is not wholly satisfactory. If emendation is resorted to, the suggestion of Bickell, adopted by Cheyne, gives a good sense: "[And] while your [flesh] is yet raw, the hot wrath [of Jehovah] shall sweep it away." Baethgen makes a slighter alteration, and renders, "While it is still raw, He sweeps it away in wrath." Retaining the existing text (which is witnessed by the LXX. and other old versions), probably the best rendering is, "Whether [it be] green or burning, He shall whirl it away." This general understanding of the words is shared by commentators who differ as to what is represented as swept away,—some making it the thorn fire, the twigs of which may be either full of sap or well alight; while others take the reference to be to the meat in the pot, which may be either "living," *i.e.* raw, or well on the way to being cooked. Neither application is quite free from difficulty, especially in view of the fact that some pressure has to be put on the word rendered "burning," which is not an adjective, but a noun, and is usually employed to designate the fiery wrath of God, as it is rendered in the amended text just mentioned. After all attempts at clearing up the verse, one must be content to put a mark of interrogation at any rendering. But the scope of the figure seems discoverable through the obscurity. It is a homely and therefore vigorous picture of half-accomplished plans suddenly reduced to utter failure, and leaving their concocters hungry for the satisfaction which seemed so near. The cookery may go on merrily and the thorns crackle cheerily, but

the simoom comes, topples over the tripod on which the pot swung, and blows the fire away in a hundred directions. Peter's gibbet was ready, and the morning of his execution was near; but when day dawned, "there was no small stir what was become of him." The wind had blown him away from the expectation of the people of the Jews into safe quarters; and the fire was dispersed.

The closing part (vv. 10, 11) breathes a stern spirit of joy over the destruction of the wicked. That is a terrible picture of the righteous bathing his feet in the blood of the wicked (Psalm lxviii. 23). It expresses not only the dreadful abundance of blood, but also the satisfaction of the "righteous" at its being shed. There is an ignoble and there is a noble and Christian satisfaction in even the destructive providences of God. It is not only permissible but imperative on those who would live in sympathy with His righteous dealings and with Himself, that they should see in these the manifestation of eternal justice, and should consider that they roll away burdens from earth and bring hope snd rest to the victims of oppression. It is no unworthy ahout of personal vengeance, nor of unfeeling triumph, that is lifted up from a relieved world when Babylon falls. If it is right in God to destroy, it cannot be wrong in His servants to rejoice that He does. Only they have to take heed that their emotion is untarnished by selfish gratulation, and is not untinged with solemn pity for those who were indeed doers of evil, but were themselves the greatest sufferers from their evil. It is hard, but not impossible, to take all that is expressed in the psalm, and to soften it by some effluence from the spirit of Him who wept over Jerusalem, and yet pronounced its doom.

The last issue of God's judgments contemplated by the psalm warrants the joy of the righteous; for in these there is a demonstration to the world that there is "fruit" to the righteous, and that notwithstanding all bewilderments from the sight of prosperous wickedness and oppressed righteousness "there is a God who judges in the earth." The word "judging" is here in the plural, corresponding with "God" (Elohim), which is also plural in form. Possibly the construction is to be explained on the ground that the words describe the thoughts of surrounding, polytheistic nations, who behold the exhibition of God's righteousness. But more probably the plural is here used for the sake of the contrast with the "gods" of ver. 1. Over these unworthy representatives of Divine justice sits the true judge, in the manifoldness of His attributes, exercising His righteous though slow-footed judgments.

PSALM LIX.

1 Deliver me from my enemies, O my God:
Out of the reach of those who arise against me set me on high.
2 Deliver me from workers of iniquity,
And from men of blood save me.
3 For, see, they have lain in wait for my soul,
The violent gather together against me:
Not for transgression or sin of mine, Jehovah.
4 Without [my] fault they run and set themselves in array:
Awake to meet me, and behold.
5 And Thou, Jehovah, God of hosts, God of Israel,
Rouse Thyself to visit all the nations:
Be not gracious to wicked apostates. Selah.

6 They return at evening, they snarl like dogs, and prowl round the city.
7 See, they foam at the mouth;
Swords are in their lips:
For "Who hears?"
8 But Thou, Jehovah, shalt laugh at them;
Thou mockest at all the nations.
9 My Strength, for Thee will I watch:
For God is my high tower.

10 My God shall come to meet me with His loving-kindness:
God will let me look on my adversaries.
11 Slay them not, lest my people forget:
Make them wanderers by Thy power (army?), and cast them down,
O Lord our shield.
12 [Each] word of their lips is a sin of their mouth,
And they snare themselves in their pride,
And for the cursing and lying [which] they speak.

13 End [them] in wrath, end [them], that they be no more:
And let them know that God is ruler in Jacob,
Unto the ends of the earth. Selah.

14 And they shall return at evening, they shall growl like dogs,
And prowl round the city.
15 They—they shall wander about for food,
If they are not gorged, then [so must] they pass the night.
16 And I will sing Thy strength,
And sound aloud Thy loving-kindness in the morning,
For Thou hast been a high tower for me,
And a refuge in the day of my straits.
17 My strength, to Thee will I harp,
For God is my high tower, the God of my loving-kindness.

THE superscription makes this the earliest of David's psalms, dating from the Sauline persecution. It has many points of connection with the others of that group, but its closest affinities are with Psalm lv., which is commonly considered to belong to the period of incubation of Absalom's rebellion (*cf.* Psalm lv. 10 with lix. 6, 14, and lv. 21 with lix. 7). The allusion to enemies patrolling the city, which is common to both psalms, seems to refer to a fact, and may in this psalm be founded on the watchfulness of Saul's emissaries; but its occurrence in both weakens its force as here confirmatory of the superscription. It does not necessarily follow from the mention of the "nations" that the psalmist's enemies are foreigners. Their presence in the city and the stress laid on words as their weapons are against that supposition. On the whole, the contents of the psalm do not negative the tradition in the title, but do not strongly attest it. If we have accepted the Davidic authorship of the other psalms of this group, we shall extend it to this one; for they clearly are a group, whether Davidic or not. The psalm falls into two principal divisions (vv. 1–9 and 10–17), each closing with a refrain, and each subdivided into two

minor sections, the former of which in each case ends with Selah, and the latter begins with another refrain. The two parts travel over much the same ground of petition, description of the enemies, confidence in deliverance and in the defeat of the foes. But in the first half the psalmist prays for himself, and in the second he prays against his persecutors, while assured confidence in his own deliverance takes the place of alarmed gaze on their might and cruelty.

The former half of the first part begins and ends with petitions. Imbedded in these is a plaintive recounting of the machinations of the adversaries, which are, as it were, spread before God's eyes, accompanied with protestations of innocence. The prayers, which enclose, as in a circlet, this description of unprovoked hatred, are varied, so that the former petitions are directed to the singer's deliverance, while the latter invoke judgment on his antagonists. The strong assertion of innocence is, of course, to be limited to the psalmist's conduct to his enemies. They attack him without provocation. Obviously this feature corresponds to the facts of Saul's hatred of David, and as obviously it does not correspond to the facts of Israel's sufferings from foreign enemies, which are supposed by the present favourite interpretation to be the occasion of the psalm. No devout singer could so misunderstand the reason of the nation's disasters as to allege that they had fallen upon innocent heads. Rather, when a psalmist bewailed national calamities, he traced them to national sins. "Anger went up against Israel, because they believed not in God." The psalmist calls God to look upon the doings of his enemies. Privy plots and open assaults are both directed against him. The enemy lie in wait for his life; but also, with fell eagerness,

like that of soldiers making haste to rank themselves in battle-array, they "run and set themselves." This is probably simply metaphor, for the rest of the psalm does not seem to contemplate actual warfare. The imminence of peril forces an urgent prayer from the threatened man. So urgent is it that it breaks in on the parallelism of ver. 4, substituting its piercing cry "Awake, behold!" for the proper second clause carrying on the description in the first. The singer makes haste to grasp God's hand, because he feels the pressure of the wind blowing in his face. It is wise to break off the contemplation of enemies and dangers by crying to God. Prayer is a good interruption of a catalogue of perils. The petitions in ver. 5 are remarkable, both in their accumulation of the Divine names and in their apparent transcending of the suppliant's need. The former characteristic is no mere artificial or tautological heaping together of titles, but indicates repeated acts of faith and efforts of contemplation. Each name suggests something in God which encourages hope, and when appealed to by a trusting soul, moves Him to act. The very introductory word of invocation, "And Thou," is weighty. It sets the might of God in grand contrast to the hurrying hatred of the adversary; and its significance is enhanced if its recurrence in ver. 8 and its relation to "And I" in ver. 16 are taken into account.

The combination of the Divine names is remarkable here, from the insertion of God (Elohim) between the two parts of the standing name, Jehovah of hosts. The anomaly is made still more anomalous by the peculiar form of the word Elohim, which does not undergo the modification to be expected in such a construction. The same peculiarities occur in other Elohistic psalms (lxxx. 4, 19, and lxxxiv. 8). The

peculiar grammatical form would be explained if the three words were regarded as three co-ordinate names, Jehovah, Elohim, Zebaoth, and this explanation is favoured by good critics. But it is going too far to say, with Baethgen, that "Zebaoth *can only* be understood as an independent Divine name" (Komm., *in loc.*). Other explanations are at least possible, such as that of Delitzsch, that "Elohim, like Jehovah, has become a proper name," and so does not suffer modification. The supplicatory force of the names, however, is clear, whatever may be the account of the formal anomalies. They appeal to God and they hearten the appellant's confidence by setting forth the loftiness of God, who rules over the embattled forces of the universe, which "run and set themselves in array" at His bidding and for His servant's help, and before which the ranks of the foes seem thin and few. They set forth also God's relation to Israel, of which the single suppliant is a member.

The petition, grounded upon these names, is supposed by modern commentators to prove that the psalmist's enemies were heathens, which would, of course, destroy the Davidic authorship, and make the singer a personification of the nation. But against this is to be observed the description of the enemies in the last clause of ver. 5 as "apostates," which must refer to Israelites. The free access to the "city," spoken of in ver. 6, is also unfavourable to that supposition, as is the prominence given to the *words* of the enemy. Foreign foes would have had other swords than those carried between their lips. The prayer that Jehovah would arise to visit "all nations" is much more naturally explained, as on the same principle as the judgment of "the peoples" in Psalm vii. All special cases are subsumed under the one general judgment.

The psalmist looks for his own deliverance as one instance of that world-wide manifestation of Divine justice which will "render to every man according to his deeds." Not only personal considerations move him to his prayer; but, pressing as these are, and shrill as is the cry for personal deliverance, the psalmist is not so absorbed in self as that he cannot widen his thoughts and desires to a world-wide manifestation of Divine righteousness, of which his own escape will be a tiny part. Such recognition of the universal in the particular is the prerogative in lower walks of the poet and the man of genius; it is the strength and solace of the man who lives by faith and links all things with God. The instruments here strike in, so as to fix attention on the spectacle of God aroused to smite and of the end of apostates.

The comparison of the psalmist's enemies to dogs occurs in another psalm ascribed to David (xxii. 16, 20). They are like the masterless, gaunt, savage curs which infest the streets of Eastern cities, hungrily hunting for offal and ready to growl or snarl at every passer-by. Though the dog is not a nocturnal animal, evening would naturally be a time when these would specially prowl round the city in search of food, if disappointed during the day. The picture suggests the enemies' eagerness, lawlessness, foulness, and persistency. If the psalm is rightly dated in the superscription, it finds most accurate realisation in the crafty, cruel watchfulness of Saul's spies. The word rendered by the A.V and R.V. "make a noise" is "said usually of the growling of the bear and the cooing of the dove" (Delitzsch). It indicates a lower sound than barking, and so expresses rage suppressed lest its object should take alarm. The word rendered (A.V. and R.V.)

"belch" means to gush out, and is found in a good sense in Psalm xix. 1. Here it may perhaps be taken as meaning "foam," with some advantage to the truth of the picture. "Swords are in their lips"—*i.e.*, their talk is of slaying the psalmist, or their slanders cut like swords; and the crown of their evil is their scoff at the apparently deaf and passive God.

With startling suddenness, as if one quick touch drew aside a curtain, the vision of God as He really regards the enemies is flashed on them in ver. 8. The strong antithesis expressed by the "And Thou," as in ver. 5, comes with overwhelming force. Below is the crowd of greedy foes, obscene, cruel, and blasphemous; above, throned in dread repose, which is not, as they dream, carelessness or ignorance, is Jehovah, mocking their fancied security. The tremendous metaphor of the laughter of God is too boldly anthropomorphic to be misunderstood. It sounds like the germ of the solemn picture in Psalm ii., and is probably the source of the similar expression in Psalm xxxvii. 13. The introduction of the wider thought of God's 'mocking"—*i.e.*, discerning, and manifesting in act, the impotence of the ungodly efforts of "all nations"—is to be accounted for on the same principle of the close connection discerned by the devout singer between the particular and the general, which explains the similar extension of view in ver. 5.

Ver. 9 is the refrain closing the first part. The reading of the Hebrew text, "His strength," must be given up, as unintelligible, and the slight alteration required for reading "my" instead of "his" adopted, as in the second instance of the refrain in ver. 17. The further alteration of text, however, by which "I will harp" would be read in ver. 9 instead of "I will

watch" is unnecessary, and the variation of the two refrains is not only in accordance with usage, but brings out a delicate phase of progress in confidence. He who begins with waiting for God ends with singing praise to God. The silence of patient expectance is changed for the melody of received deliverance.

The first part of the second division, like the corresponding portion of the first division, is mainly prayer, but with the significant difference that the petitions now are directed, not to the psalmist's deliverance, but to his enemies' punishment. For himself, he is sure that his God will come to meet him with His loving-kindness, and that, thus met and helped, he will look on, secure, at their ruin. The Hebrew margin proposes to read "The God of my loving-kindness will meet me"—an incomplete sentence, which does not tell with what God will meet him. But the text needs only the change of one vowel point in order to yield the perfectly appropriate reading, "My God shall meet me with His loving-kindness," which is distinctly to be preferred. It is singular that the substitution of "my" for "his," which is needlessly suggested by the Hebrew margin for ver. 10, is required but not suggested for ver. 9. One is tempted to wonder whether there has been a scribe's blunder attaching the correction to the wrong verse. The central portion of this part of the psalm is composed of terrible wishes for the enemies' destruction. There is nothing more awful in the imprecations of the Psalter than that petition that the boon of a swift end to their miseries may not be granted them. The dew of pity for suffering is dried up by the fire of stern desire for the exhibition of a signal instance of Divine judicial righteousness. That desire lifts the prayer above the

level of personal vengeance, but does not lighten its awfulness. There may be an allusion to the fate of Cain, who was kept alive and made a "fugitive and a vagabond." Whether that is so or not, the wish that the foes may be kept alive to be buffeted by God's *strength*—or, as the word may mean, to be scattered in panic-struck rout by God's *army*—is one which marks the difference between the old and the new covenants. The ground of these fearful punishments is vehemently set forth in ver. 12. Every word which the adversaries speak is sin. Their own self-sufficient pride, which is revolt against dependence on God, is like a trap to catch them. They speak curses and lies, for which retribution is due. This recounting of their crimes, not so much against the psalmist, though involving him, as against God, fires his indignation anew, and he flames out with petitions which seem to forget the former ones for lingering destruction: "End them in wrath, end them." The contradiction may be apparent only, and this passionate cry may presuppose the fulfilment of the former. The psalmist will then desire two dreadful things—first, protracted suffering, and then a crushing blow to end it. His ultimate desire in both is the same. He would have the evil-doers spared long enough to be monuments of God's punitive justice; he would have them ended, that the crash of their fall may reverberate afar and proclaim that God rules in Jacob. "Unto the ends of the earth" may be connected either with "rules" or with "know." In the former construction the thought will be, that from His throne in Israel God exercises dominion universally; in the latter, that the echo of the judgment on these evil-doers will reach distant lands. The latter meaning is favoured by the accents, and is, on the whole, to be

preferred. But what a strange sense of his own significance for the manifestation of God's power to the world this singer must have had, if he could suppose that the events of his life were thus of universal importance! One does not wonder that the advocates of the personification theory find strong confirmation of it in such utterances; and, indeed, the only other explanation of them is that the psalmist held, and knew himself to hold, a conspicuous place in the evolution of the Divine purpose, so that in his life, as in a small mirror, there were reflected great matters. If such anticipations were more than wild dreams, the cherisher of them must either have been speaking in the person of the nation, or he must have known himself to be God's instrument for extending His name through the world. No single person so adequately meets the requirements of such words as David.

The second part of this division (ver. 14) begins with the same words as the corresponding part of the first division (ver. 6), so that there is a kind of refrain here. The futures in vv. 14, 15, may be either simple futures or optatives. In the latter case the petitions of the preceding verses would be continued here, and the pregnant truth would result that continuance in sin is the punishment of sin. But probably the imprecations are better confined to the former part, as the Selah draws a broad line of demarcation, and there would be an incongruity in following the petition "End them" with others which contemplated the continuance of the enemies. If the verses are taken as simply predictive, the point of the reintroduction of the figure of the pack of dogs hunting for their prey lies in ver. 15. There they are described as balked in their attempts, and having to pass the night unsatisfied. Their prey

has escaped. Their eager chase, their nocturnal quest, their growling and prowling, have been vain. They lie down empty and in the dark—a vivid picture, which has wider meanings than its immediate occasion. "Ye lust and desire to have, and cannot obtain." An eternal nemesis hangs over godless lives, condemning them to hunger, after all efforts, and wrapping their pangs of unsatisfied desire in tragic darkness.

A clear strain of trust springs up, like a lark's morning song. The singer contrasts himself with his baffled foes. The "they" at the beginning of ver. 15 is emphatic in the Hebrew, and is matched with the emphatic "And I" which begins ver. 16. His "morning" is similarly set over against their "night." So petition, complaint, imprecation, all merge into a song of joy and trust, and the whole ends with the refrain significantly varied and enlarged. In its first form the psalmist said, "For Thee will I watch"; in its second he rises to "To Thee will I harp." Glad praise is ever the close of the vigils of a faithful, patient heart. The deliverance won by waiting and trust should be celebrated by praise. In the first form the refrain ran "God is my high tower," and the second part of the psalm began with "My God shall meet me with His loving-kindness." In its second form the refrain draws into itself these words which had followed it, and so modifies them that the loving-kindness which in them was contemplated as belonging to and brought by God is now joyfully clasped by the singer as his very own, by Divine gift and through his own acceptance. Blessed they who are led by occasion of foes and fears to take God's rich gifts, and can thankfully and humbly feel that His loving-kindness and all its results are theirs, because He Himself is theirs and they are His!

PSALM LX.

1 O God, Thou hast cast us off, hast broken us,
Hast been angry with us—restore us again.
2 Thou hast shaken the land, hast rent it—
Heal its breaches, for it trembles.
3 Thou hast made Thy people see hard things,
Thou hast given them to drink reeling as wine.
4 Thou hast given a banner to them that fear Thee,
[Only] that they may flee before the bow. Selah.

5 That Thy beloved ones may be delivered,
Save with Thy right hand, and answer us.
6 God has spoken in His holiness,—I will exult:
I will divide Shechem, and measure out the valley of Succoth.
7 Mine is Gilead, and mine Manasseh,
And Ephraim is the strength of my head,
Judah, my baton of command.
8 Moab is my wash basin,
Upon Edom will I throw my shoe,
Because of me, Philistia, shout aloud.

9 Who will bring me into the fenced city?
Who has guided me into Edom?
10 Hast not Thou, O God, cast us off?
And goest not out, O God, with our hosts.
11 Give us help from the oppressor,
For vain is help of man.
12 In God we shall do prowess:
And He, He will tread down our oppressors.

THIS psalm has evidently a definite historical background. Israel has been worsted in fight, but still continues its campaign against Edom. Meditating

on God's promises, the psalmist anticipates victory, which will cover defeat and perfect partial successes, and seeks to breathe his own spirit of confidence into the ranks of his countrymen. But the circumstances answering to those required by the psalm are hard to find. The date assigned by the superscription cannot be called satisfactory; for David's war there referred to (2 Sam. viii.) had no such stunning defeats as are here lamented. The Divine Oracle, of which the substance is given in the central part of the psalm, affords but dubious indications of date. At first sight it seems to imply the union of all the tribes in one kingdom, and therefore to favour the Davidic authorship. But it may be a question whether the united Israel of the Oracle is fact or prophecy. To one school of commentators, the mention of Ephraim in conjunction with Judah is token that the psalm is prior to the great revolt; to another, it is proof positive that the date is after the destruction of the northern kingdom. The Maccabean date is favoured by Olshausen, Hitzig, and Cheyne among moderns; but, apart from other objections, the reappearance of vv. 5–12 in Psalm cviii. implies that this piece of Hebrew psalmody was already venerable when a later compiler wove part of it into that psalm. On the whole, the Davidic authorship is possible, though clogged with the difficulty already mentioned. But the safest conclusion seems to be Baethgen's modest one, which contrasts strongly with the confident assertions of some other critics—namely, that assured certainty in dating the psalm "is no longer possible."

It falls into three parts of four verses each, of which the first (vv. 1–4) is complaint of defeat and prayer for help; the second (vv. 5–8), a Divine Oracle assuring

victory; and the third (vv. 9–12), the flash of fresh hope kindled by that God's-word.

The first part blends complaint and prayer in the first pair of verses, in each of which there is, first, a description of the desperate state of Israel, and then a cry for help. The nation is broken, as a wall is broken down, or as an army whose ordered ranks are shattered and scattered. Some crushing defeat is meant, which in ver. 2 is further described as an earthquake. The land trembles, and then gapes in hideous clefts, and houses become gaunt ruins. The state is disorganised as in consequence of defeat. It is an unpoetical mixture of fact and figure to see in the "rending" of the land allusion to the separation of the kingdoms, especially as that was not the result of defeat.

There is almost a tone of wonder in the designation of Israel as "Thy people," so sadly does the fate meted out to them contrast with their name. Stranger still and more anomalous is it, that, as ver. 3 *b* laments, God's own hand has commended such a chalice to their lips as should fill them with infatuation. The construction "wine of reeling" is grammatically impossible, and the best explanation of the phrase regards the nouns as in apposition—"wine which is reeling," or "reeling as wine." The meaning is that God not only sent the disaster which had shaken the nation like an earthquake, but had sent, too, the presumptuous self-confidence which had led to it.

Ver. 4 has received two opposite interpretations, being taken by some as a prolongation of the tone of lament over disaster, and by others as commemoration of God's help. The latter meaning violently interrupts the continuity of thought. "The only natural view is that

which sees" in ver. 4 "a continuation of the description of calamity" in ver. 3 (Cheyne, *in loc.*). Taking this view, we render the second clause as above. The word translated "that they may flee" may indeed mean to lift themselves up, in the sense of gathering round a standard, but the remainder of the clause cannot be taken as meaning "because of the truth," since the preposition here used never means "because of." It is best taken here as *from before.* The word variously rendered *bow* and *truth* is difficult. It occurs again in Prov. xxii. 21, and is there parallel with "truth" or faithfulness in fulfilling Divine promises. But that meaning would be inappropriate here, and would require the preceding preposition to be taken in the impossible sense already noted. It seems better, therefore, to follow the LXX. and other old versions, in regarding the word as a slightly varied mode of spelling the ordinary word for a bow (the final dental letter being exchanged for a cognate dental). The resulting meaning is deeply coloured by sad irony. "Thou hast indeed given a banner—but it was a signal for flight rather than for gathering round." Such seems the best view of this difficult verse; but it is not free from objection. "Those who fear Thee" is not a fitting designation for persons who were thus scattered in flight by God, even if it is taken as simply a synonym for the nation. We have to make choice between two incongruities. If we adopt the favourite view, that the verse continues the description of calamity, the name given to the sufferers is strange. If we take the other, that it describes God's gracious rallying of the fugitives, we are confronted with a violent interruption of the tone of feeling in this first part of the psalm. Perowne accepts the rendering *from before*

the bow, but takes the verb in the sense of mustering round, so making the banner to be a rallying-point, and the giving of it a Divine mercy.

The second part (vv. 5–8) begins with a verse which Delitzsch and others regard as really connected, notwithstanding the Selah at the end ver. 4, with the preceding. But it is quite intelligible as independent, and is in its place as the introduction to the Divine Oracle which follows, and makes the kernel of the psalm. There is beautiful strength of confidence in the psalmist's regarding the beaten, scattered people as still God's "darlings." He appeals to Him to answer, in order that a result so accordant with God's heart as the deliverance of His beloved ones may be secured. And the prayer has no sooner passed his lips than he hears the thunderous response, "God has spoken in His holiness." That infinite elevation of His nature above creatures is the pledge of the fulfilment of His word.

The following verses contain the substance of the Oracle; but it is too daring to suppose that they reproduce its words; for "I will exult" can scarcely be reverently put into the mouth of God. The substance of the whole is a twofold promise—of a united Israel, and a submissive heathendom. Shechem on the west and Succoth on the east of Jordan, Gilead and Manasseh on the east, and Ephraim and Judah on the west, are the possession of the speaker, whether he is king or representative of the nation. No trace of a separation of the kingdoms is here. Ephraim, the strongest tribe of the northern kingdom, is the "strength of my head," the helmet, or perhaps with allusion to the horns of an animal as symbols of offensive weapons. Judah is the ruling tribe, the commander's baton, or

possibly "lawgiver," as in Gen. xlix. Israel thus compact together may count on conquests over hereditary foes.

Their defeat is foretold in contemptuous images. The basin for washing the feet was "a vessel unto dishonour"; and, in Israel's great house, no higher function for his ancestral enemy, when conquered, would be found. The meaning of casting the shoe upon or over Edom is doubtful. It may be a symbol for taking possession of property, though that lacks confirmation; or Edom may be regarded as the household slave to whom the master's shoes are thrown when taken off; or, better, in accordance with the preceding reference to Moab, Edom may be regarded as part of the master's house or furniture. The one was the basin for his feet; the other, the corner where he kept his sandals.

If the text of ver. 8*c* is correct, Philistia is addressed with bitter sarcasm, and bidden to repeat her ancient shouts of triumph over Israel now, if she can. But the edition of these verses in Psalm cviii. gives a more natural reading, which may be adopted here: "Over Philistia will I shout aloud."

The third part (vv. 9–12) is taken by some commentators to breathe the same spirit as the first part. Cheyne, for instance, speaks of it as a "relapse into despondency," whilst others more truly hear in it the tones of rekindled trust. In ver. 9 there is a remarkable change of tense from "Who will bring?" in the first clause, to "Who has guided?" in the second. This is best explained by the supposition that some victory over Edom had preceded the psalm, which is regarded by the singer as a guarantee of success in his assault of "the fenced city," probably Petra.

There is no need to supplement ver. 10, so as to read, "Wilt not Thou, O God, which," etc. The psalmist recurs to his earlier lament, not as if he thought that it still held true, but just because it does not. It explained the reason of past disasters; and, being now reversed by the Divine Oracle, becomes the basis of the prayer which follows. It is as if he had said, "We were defeated because Thou didst cast us off. Now help as Thou hast promised, and we shall do deeds of valour." It is impossible to suppose that the result of the Divine answer which makes the very heart of the psalm, should be a hopeless repetition of the initial despondency. Rather glad faith acknowledges past weakness and traces past failures to self-caused abandonment by a loving God, who let His people be worsted that they might learn who was their strength, and ever goes forth with those who go forth to war with the consciousness that all help but His is vain, and with the hope that in Him even their weakness shall do deeds of prowess. "Hast not Thou cast us off?" may be the utterance of despair; but it may also be that of assured confidence, and the basis of a prayer that will be answered by God's present help.

PSALM LXI.

1 **Hear, O God, my shrill cry,**
Attend to my prayer.

2 **From the end of the earth I cry to Thee, when my heart is**
wrapped [in gloom]:
Lead me on to a rock that is too high for me to [reach]
3 **For Thou hast been a place of refuge for me,**
A tower of strength from the face of the foe.
4 **Let me dwell a guest in Thy tent for ever,**
Let me find refuge in the covert of Thy wings. Selah.
5 **For Thou, O God, hast hearkened to my vows,**
Thou hast given [me] the heritage of them that fear Thy name.

6 **Days mayest Thou add to the days of the king,**
May his years be as many generations.
7 **May he sit before God for ever:**
Give charge to loving-kindness and troth, that they guard him.

8 **So will I harp to Thy name for aye,**
That I may fulfil my vows day by day.

THE situation of the singer in this psalm is the same as in Psalm lxiii. In both he is an exile longing for the sanctuary, and in both "the king" is referred to in a way which leaves his identity with the psalmist questionable. There are also similarities in situation, sentiment, and expression with Psalms xlii. and xliii.—*e.g.*, the singer's exile, his yearning to appear in the sanctuary, the command given by God to His Loving-kindness (xlii. 8 and lxi. 8), the personification of Light and Troth as his guides (xliii. 3), compared

with the similar representation here of Loving-kindness and Troth as guards set by God over the psalmist. The traditional attribution of the psalm to David has at least the merit of providing an appropriate setting for its longings and hopes, in his flight from Absalom. No one of the other dates proposed by various critics seems to satisfy anybody but its proposer. Hupfeld calls Hitzig's suggestion "wunderbar zu lesen." Graetz inclines to the reign of Hezekiah, and thinks that "the connection gains" if the prayer for the preservation of the king's life refers to that monarch's sickness. The Babylonish captivity, with Zedekiah for "the king," is preferred by others. Still later dates are in favour now. Cheyne lays it down that "pre-Jeremian such highly spiritual hymns (*i.e.*, Psalms lxi. and lxiii.) obviously cannot be," and thinks that "it would not be unplausible to make them contemporaneous with Psalm xlii., the king being Antiochus the Great," but prefers to assign them to the Maccabean period, and to take "Jonathan, or (better) Simon" as the king. Are "highly spiritual hymns" probable products of that time?

If the Selah is accepted as marking the end of the first part of the psalm, its structure is symmetrical, so far as it is then divided into two parts of four verses each; but that division cuts off the prayer in ver. 4 from its ground in ver. 5. Selah frequently occurs in the middle of a period, and is used to mark emphasis, but not necessarily division. It is therefore better to keep vv. 4 and 5 together, thus preserving their analogy with vv. 2 and 3. The scheme of this little psalm will then be an introductory verse, followed by two parallel pairs of verses, each consisting of petition and its grounding in past mercies (vv. 2, 3, and 4, 5), and

these again succeeded by another pair containing petitions for "the king," while a final single verse, corresponding to the introductory one, joyfully foresees life-long praise evoked by the certain answers to the singer's prayer.

The fervour of the psalmist's supplication is strikingly expressed by his use in the first clause, of the word which is ordinarily employed for the shrill notes of rejoicing. It describes the quality of the sound as penetrating and emotional, not the nature of the emotion expressed by it. Joy is usually louder-tongued than sorrow; but this suppliant's need has risen so high that his cry is resonant. To himself he seems to be at "the end of the earth"; for he measures distance not as a map-maker, but as a worshipper. Love and longing are potent magnifiers of space. His heart "faints," or is "overwhelmed." The word means literally "covered," and perhaps the metaphor may be preserved by some such phrase as *wrapped in gloom*. He is, then, an exile, and therefore sunk in sadness. But while he had external separation from the sanctuary chiefly in view, his cry wakes an echo in all devout hearts. They who know most about the inner life of communion with God best know how long and dreary the smallest separation between Him and them seems, and how thick is the covering spread over the heart thereby.

The one desire of such a suppliant is for restoration of interrupted access to God. The psalmist embodies that yearning in its more outward form, but not without penetrating to the inner reality in both the parallel petitions which follow. In the first of these, (ver. 2 *b*) the thought is fuller than the condensed expression of it. "Lead me on" or in, says he, meaning, Lead me *to* and set me *on*. His imagination sees

towering above him a great cliff, on which, if he could be planted, he might defy pursuit or assault. But he is distant from it, and the inaccessibility which, were he in its clefts, would be his safety, is now his despair. Therefore he turns to God and asks Him to bear him up in His hands, that he may set his foot on that rock. The figure has been, strangely enough, interpreted to mean a rock of difficulty, but against the usage in the Psalter. But we do not reach the whole significance of the figure if we give it the mere general meaning of a place of safety. While it would be too much to say that "rock" is here an epithet of God (the absence of the definite article and other considerations are against that), it may be affirmed that the psalmist, like all devout men, knew that his only place of safety was in God. "*A* rock" will not afford adequate shelter; our perils and storms need "*the* Rock." And, therefore, this singer bases his prayer on his past experience of the safe hiding that he had found in God. "Place of refuge" and "strong tower" are distinctly parallel with "rock." The whole, then, is like the prayer in Psalm xxxi. 2, 3: "Be Thou to me a strong rock. For Thou art my rock."

The second pair of verses, containing petition and its ground in past experience (vv. 4, 5), brings out still more clearly the psalmist's longing for the sanctuary. The futures in ver. 4 may be taken either as simple expressions of certainty, or, more probably, as precative, as is suggested by the parallelism with the preceding pair. The "tent" of God is the sanctuary, possibly so called because at the date of the psalm "the ark of God dwelt in curtains." The "hiding-place of Thy wings" may then be an allusion to the Shechinah and outspread pinions of the Cherubim. But the inner reality is more

to the psalmist than the external symbols, however his faith was trained to connect the two more indissolubly than is legitimate for us. His longing was no superstitious wish to be near that sanctuary, as if external presence brought blessing, but a reasonable longing, grounded on the fact for his stage of revelation, that such presence was the condition of fullest realisation of spiritual communion, and of the safety and blessedness thence received. His prayer is the deepest desire of every soul that has rightly apprehended the facts of life, its own needs and the riches of God. The guests in God's dwelling have guest-rights of provision and protection. Beneath His wings are safety, warmth, and conscious nearness to His heart. The suppliant may feel far off, at the end of the world; but one strong desire has power to traverse all the distance in a moment. "Where the treasure is, there will the heart be also"; and where the heart is, there the man is.

The ground of this second petition is laid in God's past listening to vows, and His having given the psalmist "the heritage of those that fear Thy name." That is most naturally explained as meaning primarily the land of Israel, and as including therein all other blessings needful for life there. While it is capable of being otherwise understood, it is singularly appropriate to the person of David during the period of Absalom's rebellion, when victory was beginning to declare itself for the king. If we suppose that he had already won a battle (2 Sam. xviii. 6), we can understand how he takes that success as an omen and urges it as a plea. The pair of verses will then be one instance of the familiar argument which trustful hearts instinctively use, when they present past and incomplete mercies as reasons for continued gifts, and for the

addition of all which is needed to "perfect that which concerneth" them. It rests on the confidence that God is not one who "begins and is not able to finish."

Very naturally, then, follows the closing prayer in vv. 6, 7. The purely individual character of the rest of the psalm, which is resumed in the last verse, where the singer, speaking in the first person, reprseents his continual praise as the result of the answer to his petitions for the king, makes these petitions hopelessly irrelevant, unless the psalmist is the king and these prayers are for himself. The transition to the third person does not necessarily negative this interpretation, which seems to be required by the context. The prayer sounds hyperbolical, but has a parallel in Psalm xxi. 4, and need not be vindicated by taking the dynasty rather than the individual to be meant, or by diverting it to a Messianic reference. It is a prayer for length of days, in order that the deliverance already begun may be perfected, and that the psalmist may dwell in the house of the Lord for ever (*cf.* Psalms xxiii 6; xxvii. 4). He asks that he may sit enthroned before God for ever—that is, that his dominion may by God's favour be established and his throne upheld in peace The psalm is in so far Messianic that the everlasting kingdom of the Christ alone fulfils its prayer.

The final petition has, as has been noticed above, parallels in Psalms xlii., xliii., to which may be added the personifications of Goodness and Loving-kindness in Psalm xxiii. 6. These bright harnessed angels stand sentries over the devout suppliant, set on their guard by the great Commander; and no harm can come to him over whom God's Loving-kindness and Faithfulness keep daily and nightly watch.

Thus guarded, the psalmist's prolonged life will be

one long anthem of praise, and the days added to his days will be occupied with the fulfilment of his vows made in trouble and redeemed in his prosperity. What congruity is there between this closing verse, which is knit closely to the preceding by that "So," and the previous pair of verses, unless the king is himself the petitioner? "Let *him* sit before God for ever"—how comes that to lead up to "So will *I* harp to Thy name for ever"? Surely the natural answer is, Because "he" and "I" are the same person.

PSALM LXII.

1 Only upon God [waits] my soul [in] silence:
From Him is my salvation.
2 Only He is my rock and my salvation,
My high tower, I shall not be greatly moved.
3 How long will ye rush upon a man?
[How long] will ye all of you break him down,
Like a bulging wall, a tottering fence?
4 Only from his elevation do they consult to thrust him down, they delight in lies:
Each blesses with his mouth, and in their inner [part] they curse. Selah.

5 Only to God be silent, my soul,
For from Him is my expectation.
6 Only He is my rock and my salvation,
My high tower; I shall not be moved.
7 On God is my salvation and my glory,
The rock of my strength, my refuge, is in God.
8 Trust in him in every time, O people!
Pour out before Him your heart,
God is a refuge for us. Selah.

9 Only vanity are the sons of the lowly, a lie are the sons of the lofty,
In the scales they go up, they are [lighter] than vanity altogether.
10 Trust not in oppressions and in robbery become not vain,
When wealth grows, set not your heart thereon.
11 Once has God spoken, twice have I heard this,
That strength [belongs] to God.
12 And to Thee, O God, [belongs] loving-kindness,
For Thou, Thou renderest to a man according to his work.

THERE are several points of affinity between this psalm and the thirty-ninth,—such as the frequent use of the particle of asseveration or restriction ("surely"

or "only"); the rare and beautiful word for "silence," as expressing restful, still resignation; and the characterisation of men as "vanity." These resemblances are not proofs of identity of authorship, though establishing a presumption in its favour. Delitzsch accepts the psalm as Davidic, and refers it to the time of Absalom's revolt. The singer is evidently in a position of dignity ("elevation," ver. 4), and one whose exhortations come with force to the "people" (ver. 8), whether that word is understood as designating the nation or his immediate followers. Cheyne, who relegates the psalm to the Persian period, feels that the recognition of the singer as "a personage who is the Church's bulwark" is the natural impression on reading the psalm ("Orig. o Psalt.," 227, and 242, *n.*). If so, David's position is precisely that which is required. Whoever sang this immortal psalm, rose to the heights of conquering faith, and gave voice to the deepest and most permanent emotions of devout souls.

The psalm is in three strophes of four verses each, the divisions being marked by Selah. The two former have a long refrain at the beginning, instead of, as usually, at the end. In the first the psalmist sets his quiet trust in contrast with the furious assaults of his foes; while, in the second, he stirs himself to renewed exercise of it, and exhorts others to share with him in the security of God as a place of refuge. In the third strophe the nothingness of man is set in strong contrast to the power and loving-kindness of God, and the dehortation from trust in material wealth urged as the negative side of the previous exhortation to trust in God.

The noble saying of ver. 1 *a* is hard to translate without weakening. The initial word may have the

meanings of "Only" or "Surely." The former seems more appropriate in this psalm, where it occurs six times, in one only of which (ver. 4) does the latter seem the more natural rendering, though even there the other is possible. It is, however, to be noticed that its restrictive power is not always directed to the adjacent word; and here it may either present God as the exclusive object of the psalmist's waiting trust, or his whole soul as being nothing else but silent resignation. The reference to God is favoured by ver. 2, but the other is possible. The psalmist's whole being is, as it were, but one stillness of submission. The noises of contending desires, the whispers of earthly hopes, the mutterings of short-sighted fears, the self-asserting accents of an insisting will, are hushed, and all his nature waits mutely for God's voice. No wonder that a psalm which begins thus should end with "God hath spoken once, twice have I heard this"; for such waiting is never in vain. The soul that cleaves to God is still; and, being still, is capable of hearing the Divine whispers which deepen the silence which they bless. "There is no joy but calm"; and the secret of calm is to turn the current of the being to God. Then it is like a sea at rest.

The psalmist's silence finds voice, which does not break it, in saying over to himself what God is to him. His accumulation of epithets reminds us of Psalm xviii. 1, 2. Not only does his salvation come from God, but God Himself is the salvation which He sends forth like an angel. The recognition of God as his defence is the ground of "silence"; for if He is "my rock and my salvation," what can be wiser than to keep close to Him, and let Him do as He will? The assurance of personal safety is inseparable from such a thought of God.

Nothing which does not shake the rock can shake the frail tent pitched on it. As long as the tower stands, its inhabitant can look down from his inaccessible fastness with equanimity, though assailed by crowds. Thus the psalmist turns swiftly, in the latter pair of verses making up the first strophe, to address remonstrances to his enemies, as engaged in a useless effort, and then drops direct address and speaks *of* their hostility and treachery. The precise meaning of parts of ver. 3 has been misapprehended, by reason of the peculiarities of some of the words and the condensed character of the imagery in *b*, *c*. The rendering above is substantially that generally accepted now. It sets in striking contrast the single figure of the psalmist and the multitude of his assailants. "All of you" rush upon a man like a pack of hounds on one defenceless creature, and try to break him down, as men put their shoulders to a wall in order to overthrow it. The partial success of the assault is hinted in the epithets applied to wall and fence, which are painted as beginning to give under pressure. Language of confidence sounds strangely in such circumstances. But the toppling wall, with all these strong men pushing at it, will "not be greatly moved." The assailants might answer the psalmist's "How long?" with defiant confidence that a short time only was needed to complete the begun ruin; but he, firm in his faith, though tottering in his fortunes, knows better, and, in effect, tells them by his question that, however long they may press against his feebleness, they will never overthrow him. The bulging wall outlasts its would-be destroyers. But appeal to them is vain; for they have one settled purpose absorbing them—namely, to cast him down from his height. He is, then, probably in some position of distinction,

threatened by false friends, who are plotting his deposition, while their words are fair. All these circumstances agree well with the Davidic authorship.

The second strophe reiterates the refrain, with slight but significant variations, and substitutes for the address to and contemplation of the plotters a meditation on the psalmist's own security, and an invitation to others to share it. In ver. 5 the refrain is changed from a declaration of the psalmist's silent waiting to self-exhortation thereto. Cheyne would assimilate the two verses by making both verbs imperatives; but that change destroys the beautiful play of feeling, so true to experience, which passes from consciousness of one's attitude towards God to effort at preserving it. No emotions, however blessed, deep, and real, will last, unless perpetually renewed. Like carbon points in electric lights, they burn away as they burn, and the light dies, unless there is some impulse which presses a fresh surface forward to receive the fiery kiss that changes its blackness into radiance. The "expectation" in ver. 5 *b* is substantially equivalent to the "salvation" in ver. 1 *b*. It means not the emotion (which could not be said to be "from Him"), but the thing expected, just as "hope" is used for the *res sperata*. The change in expression from "salvation" to "expectation" makes prominent the psalmist's attitude. In his silence his wistful eyes look up, watching for the first far-off brightening which tells him that help is on its road from the throne. Salvation will not come unexpected, and expectation will not look for succours in vain.

There may be deep meaning in the slight omission of "greatly" in the second refrain. Confidence has grown. The first hope was that the waiting heart

should not be much shaken, that the tottering fence should not be quite thrown down; the second is that it shall not be shaken at all. An access of faith has poured into the singer's soul with his song; and now he has no thought of the crowd of assailants, who have faded from his sight because he is gazing on God. Hence the second pair of verses in this strophe (vv. 7, 8) substitutes for the description of their fierce rush the triumphant reiteration of what God is to the psalmist, and an invitation to others to come with him into that strong refuge. The transition to addressing the "people" is natural, if the psalm is David's. The phrase would then apply to his immediate followers, who were one with him in peril, and whom he would fain have one with him in trust. But the LXX. has another reading, which involves only the insertion of a letter, that may easily have dropped out, in the word rendered "time," and which makes the verse run more smoothly. It reads "all the congregation of the people," in which it is followed by Baethgen, Cheyne, and others. Whoever the psalmist was, he felt the impulse which follows all deep experience of the security that comes from hiding in God—namely, the longing to beckon in others out of the storm into peace. Every man who has learned that God is a refuge for him is thereby assured that He is the same for all men, and thereby moved to beseech them to make the like blessed discovery. The way into that hiding-place is trust. "Pour out before Him your heart," says the psalmist. "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God," says Paul. They both mean the same thing. We take refuge in our refuge when we set our faith on God, and tell Him all that threatens or troubles us.

When we do, we are no longer in the open, defenceless before the rush of enemies, but housed in God, or, as Paul puts it, guarded in Christ Jesus, as in a fortress. No wonder that the psalm pauses for a moment on that thought, and lets the notes of harp and horn impress it on the listeners!

The third strophe sets the emptiness of men in strong contrast to the sufficiency of God. "Vanity" is literally "a breath," and would better be so rendered in ver. 9, but for the recurrence of the verb from the same root in ver. 10, which requires the rendering "be not vain." It is desirable to preserve identity of translation, so as to retain the play of words. But by doing so ver. 9 is somewhat weakened. The eyes that have been looking on God are cleared to see the shadowy nothingness of men of all degrees. The differences of high and low dwindle when seen from that "high tower," as lower lands appear flat when viewed from a mountain top. They are but "breath," so fleeting, unsubstantial are they. They are a "lie," in so far as hopes directed to them are deceived and trust misplaced. The singer is not cynically proclaiming man's worthlessness, but asserting his insufficiency as the object of man's trust. His point of view is different from that of Psalm xxxix., though his words are the same. The "Only" which begins ver. 9 carries us back to the similar beginning of the preceding strophes, and brings out the true force of the following words, by suggesting the contrast between men and the God on whom the psalmist's soul waits in silence. That contrast may be further continued in ver. 9 *b*. The lowly and the lofty are in one scale. What is in the other, the solid weight of which sends them aloft as lighter? Is it pressing the metaphor too far to suppose that the

psalmist is weighing the whole mass of men against God only? Heap them altogether and balance them against Him, and the gathered mass does not weigh as much as an imponderable breath. Who could trust in that emptiness when he has God to trust in? Who would grasp shadows when he may cling to that eternal Substance?

The natural conclusion from ver. 9 follows in the exhortation of ver. 10, which completes the positive presentation of the true object of trust (ver. 8) by the warning against false refuges. The introduction of "oppression" and "robbery" is singular, for it can scarcely be supposed that the assailants of the psalmist are here addressed, and still less that his followers needed to be warned against these crimes. Cheyne, therefore, follows Graetz and others in reading "perverseness" for "oppression," and "crookedness" for "robbery"; but the alteration throws the clause out of harmony with the next clause. It may be that in ver. 10*a* the psalmist has in view unjust gain and in *b* justly acquired wealth, and that thus his two dehortations cover the whole ground of material riches, as if he had said, "Whether rightly or wrongly won, they are wrongly used if they are trusted in." The folly and misery of such trust are vigorously set forth by that word "become vain." The curse of misplaced confidence is that it brings down a man to the level of what he trusts in, as the blessing of wisely placed trust is that it lifts him to that level. Trust in vanity is vain, and makes the truster "vanity." Wind is not a nourishing diet. It may inflate, or, as Paul says about knowledge, may "puff up," but not "build up." Men are assimilated to the objects of their trust; and if these are empty, "so is every one that trusteth in them."

So far the psalmist has spoken. But his silent waiting has been rewarded with a clear voice from heaven, confirming that of his faith. It is most natural to regard the double revelation received by the psalmist as repeated in the following proclamation of the two great aspects of the Divine nature—Power and Loving-kindness. The psalmist has learned that these two are not opposed nor separate, but blend harmoniously in God's nature, and are confluent in all His works. Power is softened and directed by Loving-kindness. Loving-kindness has as its instrument Omnipotence. The synthesis of these two is in the God whom men are invited to trust; and such trust can never be disappointed; for His Power and His Loving-kindness will co-operate to "render to a man according to his work." The last word of the psalm adds the conception of Righteousness to those of Power and Loving-kindness. But the psalmist seems to have in view mainly one direction in which that rendering "to a man according to his work" is active—namely, in answering the trust which turns away from human power which is weakness, and from human love which may change and must die, to anchor itself on the might and tenderness of God. Such "work of faith" will not be in vain; for these twin attributes of Power and Love are pledged to requite it with security and peace.

PSALM LXIII.

1 O God, my God art Thou, I seek Thee earnestly,
My soul thirsts for Thee, my flesh pines for Thee,
In a dry and weary land, without water.
2 So in the sanctuary have I gazed on Thee,
To see Thy power and Thy glory.
3 For Thy loving-kindness is better than life,
[Therefore] my lips shall praise Thee.
4 So will I bless Thee while I live,
In Thy name will I lift my hands.

5 As [with] fat and marrow shall my soul be satisfied,
And with lips that joyfully shout shall my mouth praise Thee,
6 When I remember Thee on my bed,
Through the watches [of the night] do I meditate on Thee.
7 For Thou hast been a help for me,
And in the shadow of Thy wings will I shout for joy.

8 My soul cleaves [to and presses] after Thee,
Me does Thy right hand uphold.
9 But these—for its destruction they seek my soul;
They shall go into the undermost parts of the earth.
10 They shall be given over to the power of the sword,
The portion of jackals shall they be.
11 But the king shall rejoice in God,
Every one that swears by Him shall glory,
For the mouth of them that speak a lie shall be stopped.

IF the psalmist is allowed to speak, he gives many details of his circumstances in his song. He is in a waterless and weary land, excluded from the sanctuary, followed by enemies seeking his life. He expects a fight, in which they are to fall by the sword, and appa-

rently their defeat is to lead to his restoration to his kingdom.

These characteristics converge on David. Cheyne has endeavoured to show that they fit the faithful Jews in the Maccabean period, and that the "king" in ver. 2 is "Jonathan or [better] Simon" ("Orig. of Psalt.," 99, and "Aids to Dev. Study of Crit.," 308 *seqq.*). But unless we are prepared to accept the dictum that "Pre-Jeremian such highly spiritual hymns obviously cannot be" (*u.s.*), the balance of probability will be heavily in favour of the Davidic origin.

The recurrence of the expression "My soul" in vv. 1, 5, 8, suggests the divisions into which the psalm falls. Following that clue, we recognise three parts, in each of which a separate phase of the experience of the soul in its communion with God is presented as realised in sequence by the psalmist. The soul longs and thirsts for God (vv. 1–4). The longing soul is satisfied in God (vv. 5–7). The satisfied soul cleaves to and presses after God (vv. 8–11). These stages melt into each other in the psalm as in experience, but are still discernible.

In the first strophe the psalmist gives expression in immortal words to his longing after God. Like many a sad singer before and after him, he finds in the dreary scene around an image of yet drearier experiences within. He sees his own mood reflected in the grey monotony of the sterile desert, stretching waterless on every side, and seamed with cracks, like mouths gaping for the rain that does not come. He is weary and thirsty; but a more agonising craving is in his spirit, and wastes his flesh. As in the kindred Psalms xlii., xliii., his separation from the sanctuary has dimmed his sight of God. He longs for the return of that vision

in its former clearness. But even while he thirsts, he in some measure possesses, since his resolve to "seek earnestly" is based on the assurance that God is his God. In the region of the devout life the paradox is true that we long precisely because we have. Every soul is athirst for God; but unless a man can say, "Thou art my God," he knows not how to interpret nor where to slake his thirst, and seeks, not after the living Fountain of waters, but after muddy pools and broken cisterns.

Ver. 2 is difficult principally because the reference of the initial "So" is doubtful. By some it is connected with the first clause of ver. 1: "So"—*i.e.*, as my God—"have I seen Thee." Others suppose a comparison to be made between the longing just expressed and former ones, and the sense to be, "With the same eager desire as now I feel in the desert have I gazed in the sanctuary." This seems the better view. Hupfeld proposes to transpose the two clauses, as the A.V. has done in its rendering, and thus gets a smoother run of thought. The immediate object of the psalmist's desire is thus declared to be "to behold Thy power and glory," and the "So" is substantially equivalent to "According as." If we retain the textual order of the clauses, and understand the first as paralleling the psalmist's desert longing with that which he felt in the sanctuary, the second clause will state the aim of the ardent gaze—namely, to "behold Thy power and Thy glory." These attributes were peculiarly manifested amid the imposing sanctities where the light of the Shechinah, which was especially designated as "the Glory," shone above the ark.

The first clause of ver. 3 is closely connected with the preceding, and gives the reason for some part of the emotion there expressed, as the introductory "For"

shows. But it is a question to which part of the foregoing verses it refers. It is probably best taken as assigning the reason for their main subject—namely, the psalmist's thirst after God. "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Our desires are shaped by our judgments of what is good. The conviction of God's transcendent excellence and absolute sufficiency for all our cravings must precede the direction of these to Him. Unless all enjoyments and possessions, which become ours through our corporeal life, and that life itself, are steadfastly discerned to be but a feather's weight in comparison with the pure gold of God's loving-kindness, we shall not long for it more than for them.

The deep desires of this psalmist were occasioned by his seclusion from outward forms of worship, which were to him so intimately related to the inward reality, that he felt farther away from God in the wilderness than when he caught glimpses of His face, through the power and glory which he saw visibly manifested in the sanctuary. But in his isolation he learns to equate his desert yearnings with his sanctuary contemplations, and thus glides from longing to fruition. His devotion, nourished by forms, is seen in the psalm in the very act of passing on to independence of form; and so springs break out for him in the desert. His passion of yearning after God rebukes and shames our faint desires. This man's soul was all on the stretch to grasp and hold God. His very physical frame was affected by his intense longing. If he did not long too much, most men, even those who thirst after God most, long terribly too little. Strong desire has a joy in its very aching; feeble desire only makes men restless and uncomfortable. Nothing can be more preposterous than tepid aspirations after the greatest and only good.

To hold as creed that God's loving-kindness is better than life, and to wish a little to possess it, is surely irrational, if anything is so.

The remaining clauses of ver. 3 and ver. 4 form a transition to the full consciousness of satisfaction which animates the psalmist in the second part. The resolve to praise, and the assurance that he will have occasion to praise, succeed his longing with startling swiftness. The "So" of ver. 4 seems to be equivalent to "Accordingly"—*i.e.*, since Thy loving-kindness is such supreme good, and is mine because I have desired it. Continual praise and as continual invocation are the fitting employments of those who receive it, and by these alone can their possession of the loving-kindness bestowed be made permanent. If empty palms are not ever lifted towards God, His gifts will not descend. When these are received, they will fall like morning sunbeams on stony and dumb lips, which before were only parted to let out sighs, and will draw forth music of praise. There are longings which never are satisfied; but God lets no soul that thirsts for Him perish for lack of the water of life. Wisdom bids us fix our desires on that Sovereign Good, to long for which is ennobling and blessed, and to possess which is rest and the beginning of heaven.

Thus the psalmist passes imperceptibly to the second strophe, in which the longing soul becomes the satisfied soul. The emblem of a feast is naturally suggested by the previous metaphor of thirst. The same conviction, which urged the psalmist forward in his search after God, now assures him of absolute satisfaction in finding Him. Since God's loving-kindness is better than life, the soul that possesses Him can have no unappeased cravings, nor any yet hungry affections

or wishes. In the region of communion with God, fruition is contemporaneous with and proportioned to desire. When the rain comes in the desert, what was baked earth is soon rich pasture, and the dry torrent beds, where the white stones glittered ghastly in the sunshine, are musical with rushing streams and fringed with budding oleanders. On that telegraph a message is flashed upwards and an answer speeds downwards, in a moment of time. Many of God's gifts are delayed by Love; but the soul that truly desires Him has never long to wait for a gift that equals its desire.

When God is possessed, the soul is satisfied. So entire is the correspondence between wants and gift, that every concavity in us finds, as it were, a convexity to match it in Him. The influx of the great ocean of God fills every curve of the shore to the brim, and the flashing glory of that sunlit sea covers the sands, and brings life where stagnation reigned and rotted. So the satisfied soul lives to praise, as the psalm goes on to vow. Lips that drink such draughts of Loving-kindness will not be slow to tell its sweetness. If we have nothing to say about God's goodness, the probable cause is our want of experience of it.

That feast leaves no bitter taste. The remembrance of it is all but as sweet as its enjoyment was. Thus, in ver. 6, the psalmist recounts how, in the silent hours of night, when many joys are seen to be hollow, and conscience wakes to condemn coarse delights, he recalled his blessednesses in God, and, like a ruminant animal, tasted their sweetness a second time. The verse is best regarded as an independent sentence. So blessed was the thought of God, that, if once it rose in his wakeful mind as he lay on his bed, he "meditated"

on it all the night. Hasty glances show little of anything great. Nature does not unveil her beauty to a cursory look; much less does God disclose His. If we would feel the majesty of the heavens, we must gaze long and steadfastly into their violet depths. The mention of the "night-watches" is appropriate, if this psalm is David's. He and his band of fugitives had to keep vigilant guard as they lay down shelterless in the desert; but even when thus ringed by possible perils, and listening for the shout of nocturnal assailants, the psalmist could recreate and calm his soul by meditation on God. Nor did his experience of God's sufficiency bring only remembrances; it kindled hopes. "For Thou hast been a help for me; and in the shadow of Thy wings will I shout for joy." Past deliverances minister to present trust and assure of future joy. The prerogative of the soul, blessed in the sense of possessing God, is to discern in all that has been the manifestations of His help, and to anticipate in all that is to come the continuance of the same. Thus the second strophe gathers up the experiences of the satisfied soul as being fruition, praise, sweet lingering memories that fill the night of darkness and fear, and settled trust in the coming of a future which will be of a piece with such a present and past.

The third strophe (vv. 8–11) presents a stage in the devout soul's experience which naturally follows the two preceding. Ver. 8 has a beautifully pregnant expression for the attitude of the satisfied soul. Literally rendered, the words run, "cleaves after Thee," thus uniting the ideas of close contact and eager pursuit. Such union, however impossible in the region of lower aims, is the very characteristic of communion with God, in which fruition subsists along with longing, since

God is infinite, and the closest approach to and fullest possession of Him are capable of increase. Satisfaction tends to became satiety when that which produces it is a creature whose limits are soon reached; but the cup which God gives to a thirsty soul has no cloying in its sweetness. On the other hand, to seek after Him has no pain nor unrest along with it, since the desire for fuller possession comes from the felt joy of present attainment. Thus, in constant interchange satisfaction and desire beget each other, and each carries with it some trace of the other's blessedness.

Another beautiful reciprocity is suggested by the very order of the words in the two clauses of ver. 8. The first ends with "Thee"; the second begins with "Me." The mutual relation of God and the soul is here set forth. He who "cleaves after God" is upheld in his pursuit by God's hand. And not in his pursuit only, but in all his life; for the condition of receiving sustaining help is desire for it, directed to God and verified by conduct. Whoever thus follows hard after God will feel his outstretched, seeking hand inclosed in a strong and loving palm, which will steady him against assaults and protect him in dangers. "No man is able to pluck them out of the Father's hand," if only they do not let it go. It may slip from slack fingers.

We descend from the heights of mystic communion in the remainder of the psalm. But in the singer's mind his enemies were God's enemies, and, as ver. 11 shows, were regarded as apostates from God in being traitors to "the king." They did not "swear by Him"—*i.e.*, they did not acknowledge God as God. Therefore, such being their character, the psalmist's confidence that God's right hand upheld him necessarily

passes into assurance of their defeat. This is not vindictiveness, but confidence in the sufficiency of God's protection, and is perfectly accordant with the lofty strains of the former part of the psalm. The picture of the fate of the beaten foe is partly drawn from that of Korah and his company. These rebels against God's king shall go, where those rebels against His priest long ago descended. "They shall be poured out upon the hands of the sword," or, more literally still, "They shall pour him out," is a vigorous metaphor, incapable of transference into English, describing how each single enemy is given over helplessly, as water is poured out, to the sword, which is energetically and to our taste violently, conceived of as a person with hands. The meaning is plain—a battle is impending, and the psalmist is sure that his enemies will be slain, and their corpses torn by beasts of prey.

How can the "king's" rejoicing in God be the consequence of their slaughter, unless they are rebels? And what connection would the defeat of a rebellion have with the rest of the psalm, unless the singer were himself the king? "This one line devoted to the king is strange," says Cheyne. The strangeness is unaccounted for, but on the supposition that David is the king and singer. If so, it is most natural that his song should end with a note of triumph, and should anticipate the joy of his own heart and the "glorying" of his faithful followers, who had been true to God in being loyal to His anointed.

PSALM LXIV.

1 Hear, O God, my voice in my complaint,
From the fear of the enemy guard my life.
2 Hide me from the secret assembly of evil-doers,
From the noisy crowd of workers of iniquity:

3 Who whet, like a sword, their tongue,
[Who] aim [as] their arrow a bitter word,
4 To shoot in hiding-places [at] the upright:
Suddenly they shoot [at] him, and fear not.

5 They strengthen themselves [in] an evil plan,
They talk of laying snares,
They say, Who looks at them?
6 They scheme villainies,
We have perfected [say they] a scheme [well] schemed:
And the inward part of each, and [his] heart, is deep.

7 But God shoots [at] them [with] an arrow,
Suddenly come their wounds.
8 And they are made to stumble,
Their own tongue [comes] upon them,
All who look on them shake the head.

9 And all men fear,
And declare the act of God,
And understand His work.
10 The righteous shall rejoice in Jehovah, and take refuge in Him,
And all the upright in heart shall glory.

FAMILIAR notes are struck in this psalm, which has no very distinctive features. Complaint of secret slanderers, the comparison of their words to arrows and swords, their concealed snares, their blasphemous defiance of detection, the sudden flashing out

of God's retribution, the lesson thereby read to and learned by men, the vindication of God's justice, and praise from all true hearts, are frequent themes. They are woven here into a whole which much resembles many other psalms. But the singer's heart is none the less in his words because many others before him have had to make like complaints and to stay themselves on like confidence. "We have all of us one human heart," and well-worn words come fresh to each lip when the grip of sorrow is felt.

The division into pairs of verses is clear here. The burdened psalmist begins with a cry for help, passes on to dilate on the plots of his foes, turns swiftly from these to confidence in God, which brings future deliverance into present peril and sings of it as already accomplished, and ends with the assurance that his enemies' punishment will witness for God and gladden the upright.

In the first pair of verses complaint is sublimed into prayer, and so becomes strengthening instead of weakening. He who can cry "Hear, O God, guard, hide" has already been able to hide in a safe refuge. "The terror caused by the enemy" is already dissipated when the trembling heart grasps at God; and escape from facts which warrant terror will come in good time. This man knows himself to be in danger of his life. There are secret gatherings of his enemies, and he can almost hear their loud voices as they plan his ruin. What can he do, in such circumstances, but fling himself on God? No thought of resistance has he. He can *but* pray, but he *can* pray; and no man is helpess who can look up. However high and closely engirdling may be the walls that men or sorrows build around us, there is always an opening in the dungeon

roof, through which heaven is visible and prayers can mount.

The next two pairs of verse (3–6) describe the machinations of the enemies in language for the most part familiar, but presenting some difficulties. The metaphors of a slanderous tongue as a sword and mischief-meaning words as arrows have occurred in several other psalms (*e.g.*, lv. 21 ; lvii. 4 ; lix. 7). The reference may either be to calumnies or to murderous threats and plans. The latter is the more probable. Secret plots are laid, which are suddenly unmasked. From out of some covert of seeming friendship an unlooked-for arrow whizzes. The archers "shoot, and fear not." They are sure of remaining concealed, and fear neither man's detection of them nor God's.

The same ideas are enlarged on in the third verse-pair (5, 6) under a new metaphor. Instead of arrows flying in secret, we have now snares laid to catch unsuspecting prey. "They strengthen themselves [in] an evil plan" (lit. *word*) pictures mutual encouragement and fixed determination. They discuss the best way of entrapping the psalmist, and, as in the preceding verse, flatter themselves that their subtle schemes are too well buried to be observed, whether by their victim or by God. Ver. 6 tells without a figure the fact meant in both figures. "They scheme villainies," and plume themselves upon the cleverness of their unsuspected plots. The second clause of the verse is obscure. But the suppositions that in it the plotters speak as in the last clause of the preceding verse, and that "they say" or the like expression is omitted for the sake of dramatic effect, remove much of the difficulty. "We have schemed a well-schemed plan" is their complacent estimate.

God's retribution scatters their dreams of impunity, as the next pair of verses (*7*, 8) tells. The verbs are in the past tense, though the events described are still in the future; for the psalmist's faith reckons them to be as good as done. They were shooting at him. God will shoot at them. The archer becomes a target. "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." Punishment is moulded after the guise of sin. The allusion to ver. 4 is made more obvious by adopting a different division of ver. *7* from that directed by the accents, and beginning the second half with "Suddenly," as in ver. 4. Ver. 8 *b* is with difficulty made intelligible with the existing reading. Probably the best that can be done with it is to render it as above, though it must be acknowledged that "their tongue comes upon them" needs a good deal of explanation to be made to mean that the consequences of their sins of speech fall on them. The drift of the clause must be that retribution falls on the offending tongue; but there is probably some textual corruption now unremovable. Cheyne wisely falls back on asterisks. Whatever is the precise nature of the instance of *lex talionis* in the clause, it is hailed with gestures of scornful approval by all beholders. Many men approve the Divine punishments, who have no deep horror of the sins that are punished. There is something of a noble, if rough, sense of justice in most men, and something of an ignoble satisfaction in seeing the downfall of the powerful, and both sentiments set heads nodding approval of God's judgments.

The psalm closes with the familiar thought that these judgments will move to wholesome awe and be told from lip to lip, while they become to the righteous occasion of joy, incitements to find refuge in God, and

material for triumph. These are large consequences to flow from one man's deliverance. The anticipation would be easily explained if we took the speaker to be the personified nation. But it would be equally intelligible if he were in any way a conspicuous or representative person. The humblest may feel that his experience of Divine deliverance witnesses, to as many as know it, of a delivering God. That is a high type of godliness which, like this psalmist, counts the future as so certain that it can be spoken of as present even in peril. It augurs a still higher to welcome deliverance, not only for the ease it brings to the suppliant, but for the glory it brings to God.

PSALM LXV.

1 To Thee silence is praise, O God, in Zion,
And to Thee shall the vow be paid.
2 O Thou hearer of prayer,
To Thee all flesh comes.
3 Deeds of iniquity have been too strong for me:
Our transgressions—Thou, Thou coverest them.
4 Blessed is he whom Thou choosest and bringest near,
That he may dwell in Thy courts:
We would be filled with the goodness of Thy house,
Thy holy temple.

5 By dread deeds in righteousness Thou dost answer us, O God of our salvation,
The confidence of all the ends of the earth and of the remotest sea:
6 Setting fast the mountains by His strength,
Being girded with might,
7 Stilling the roar of the seas, the roar of their billows,
And the tumult of the peoples.
8 So that the inhabitants of the ends [of the earth] become afraid at Thy signs:
The regions whence morning and evening come forth
Thou makest to shout for joy.

9 Thou hast visited the land and watered it,
Thou enrichest it abundantly [by] a river of God, full of water,
Thou preparest their corn when thus Thou preparest it:
10 Watering its furrows, levelling its ridges,
With showers Thou softenest it,
Its outgrowth Thou dost bless.
11 Thou hast crowned the year of Thy goodness,
And Thy chariot-tracks drop fatness.

12 The pastures of the wilderness drop,
And the heights gird themselves with leaping gladness.
13 The meadows are clothed with flocks,
And the valleys are covered with corn,
They shout for joy, they also sing.

THIS and the two following psalms form a little group, with one great thought dominant in each —namely, that God's manifestations of grace and providence to Israel are witnesses to the world. They all reach out to "the ends of the earth" in yearning and confidence that God's name will be adored there, and they all regard His dealings with His people as His appeals to mankind, which will not always be vain. Psalm lxv. begins with that privilege of approach to God with which Psalm lxvi. ends. In both, iniquity in heart is regarded as hindering access to God; and, in both, the psalmist's experience of answered prayer is treated as testimony for the world of the blessedness of worshipping Israel's God. This psalm falls into three parts, which set forth a threefold revelation of God in His acts. The first (vv. 1–4) deals with the most intimate privileges of the men who dwell in His house. The second (vv. 5–8) points to His rule in nature, the tokens of God's power in the mighty things of creation —mountains, ocean, day and night, the radiant east, the solemn sunset-west. The third (vv. 9–13) gives a lovely picture of the annual miracle which brings harvest joys. The underlying thought binding these three parts into unity seems to be the witness to God's name which each set of His acts bears—a witness which "they that dwell in the uttermost parts" hear sounded in their ears. If this is the true view of the psalm, we may hear a reminiscence of it in Paul's remonstrance with the rude Lycaonian peasants: "He

left not Himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave you rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts with food and gladness."

The first strophe is wholly concerned with the glory of God as answering prayer. It begins with enigmatical words, which, if the existing text is adhered to, carry a deep truth. There are two kinds of prayer—wordless submission of will and spoken vows. The former is truly praise. The same thought is found in Psalm lxii. It goes down to the root of the matter. The true notion of prayer is not that of swaying God's will to gratify ours, but that of bringing ours into unremonstrating acceptance of His. When the accents of eager desire or of impatient murmuring and vain sobs and weeping are hushed, the still soul enters into closeness of communion, else unattainable. Beautiful and profoundly true as this is, it is not indubitably the psalmist's meaning; and there is much to be said for the rendering which is adopted from the LXX. by many commentators, and which only requires a slight change in the vocalisation—namely, "Praise is meet for Thee." But that idea is expressed in Psalm xxxiii. 1 by a different word, and the meaning of the one used here is not *to be suitable for*, but *to be like*. So that we have to choose between altering the text and then imposing a somewhat unusual meaning on the word gained, and adhering to the present reading and gaining a meaning which is admitted to be "fine" but alleged to be "unbiblical." On the whole, that meaning seems preferable. The convictions that God accepts silent devotion and answers vows, so that the thank-offering promised in trouble will be called for by deliverance, "fill the psalmist with a longing that all mankind may have recourse to the same Divine Friend" (Cheyne,

in loc.). His experience of accepted prayers has taught him that it is God's nature and property to be "the hearer of prayer" (the word is a participle, expressive of a permanent characteristic), and therefore he is sure that "all flesh," in its weariness and need of an ear into which to pour necessities and sorrows, will come to Him. His eye travels far beyond Israel, and contemplates mankind as coming to worship. But one black barrier rises between men and God, the separating power of which the singer has painfully felt. Sin chokes the stream that would flow from seeking hearts into the ocean of God. The very act of gathering himself up to pray and praise quickens the sense of sinfulness in the psalmist. Therefore his look turns swiftly inwards, for the only time in the psalm. The consciousness of transgression wakes the sense of personality and isolation as nothing else will, and for one bitter moment the singer is, as it were, prisoned in the awful solitude of individual responsibility. His words reflect his vivid sight of his sins in their manifoldness, for he says that "matters of iniquities" have overcome him. The exuberant expression is not tautological, but emotional. And then he passes into sunshine again, and finds that, though he had to be alone in guilt, he is one of a company in the experience of forgiveness. Emphatically he reduplicates "Thou" in his burst of confidence in God's covering of sins; for none but God can cope with the evil things that are too strong for man. I can neither keep them out, nor drive them out when they have come in, nor cleanse the stains that their hoofs have made; but Thou, Thou canst and dost cover them. Is not that an additional reason for "all flesh" coming to God, and almost a guarantee that they will?

The strophe ends with an exclamation celebrating the blessedness of dwelling with God. That refers, no doubt, to Israel's prerogative of access to the Temple; but the inward and outward are blended, as in many places in the Psalter where dwelling in the house of the Lord is yearned for or rejoiced in. The universalism of the psalm does not forget the special place held by the nation whom God "has chosen and brought near." But the reality beneath the symbol is too familiar and sweet to this singer for him to suppose that mere outward access exhausts the possibilities of blessed communion. It is no violent forcing more into his words than they contain, if we read in them deeply spiritual truths. It is noteworthy that they follow the reference to forgiveness, and, when taken in conjunction therewith, may be called an itinerary of the road to God. First comes forgiveness by expiation, for such is the meaning of "covering," Then the cleansed soul has "access with confidence"; then approaching, it happily dwells a guest in the house, and is supplied with that which satisfies all desires. The guest's security in the house of his host, his right to protection, help, and food, are, as usual, implied in the imagery. The prerogative of his nation, which the psalmist had in mind, is itself imagery, and the reality which it shadowed is that close abiding in God which is possible by faith, love, communion of spirit, and obedience of life, and which, wherever realised, keeps a soul in a great calm, whatever tempests rave, and satisfies its truest needs and deepest longings, whatever famine may afflict the outward life. Forgiven men may dwell with God. They who do are blessed.

The second strophe (vv. 5–8) celebrates another aspect of God's manifestation by deeds, which has, in

like manner, a message for the ends of the earth. Israel is again the immediate recipient of God's acts, but they reverberate through the world. Therefore in ver. 5 the two clauses are not merely adjacent, but connected. It is because God is ever revealing Himself to the nation (for the tense of the verb "answer" expresses continuous action) that He is revealed as the trust of the whole earth. God's grace fructifies through Israel to all. How clearly the psalmist had grasped the truth that God has limited the knowledge of Himself to one spot of earth in order to its universal diffusion!

The light is focussed and set in a tower that it may shine out over sea and storm. The fire is gathered into a brasier that it may warm all the house. Some commentators take that strong expression "the trust of all the ends of the earth" as asserting that even the confidences of idolaters in their gods are at bottom trust in Jehovah and find their way to Him. But such a view of idolatry is foreign to the Old Testament, and is not needed to explain the psalmist's words. God is the only worthy object of trust, and remains so whether men do in fact trust Him or not. And one day, thinks the psalmist, God's patient manifestation of His grace to Israel will tell, and all men will come to know Him for what He is. "The remotest sea" is not translation, but paraphrase. The psalmist speaks in vague terms, as one who knew not what lay beyond the horizon of that little-traversed western ocean. Literally his words are "the sea of the remote [peoples]"; but a possible emendation has been suggested, reading instead of *sea* "regions" or "nations." The change is slight, and smooths an awkward expression, but destroys the antithesis of earth and sea, and makes the second clause a somewhat weak repetition of the first.

From the self-revelation of God in history the psalm passes to His mighty deeds in nature (vv. 6, 7 *a*), and from these it returns to His providential guidance of human affairs (ver. 7 *b*). The two specimens of Divine power celebrated in vv. 6, 7, are suggested by the closing words of ver. 5. "The ends of the earth" were, according to ancient cosmography, girdled by mountains; and God has set these fast. The dash of "the remotest seas" is hushed by Him. Two mighty things are selected to witness to the Mightier who made and manages them. The firm bulk of the mountains is firm because He is strong. The tossing waves are still because He bids them be silent. How transcendently great then is He, and how blind those who, seeing hill and ocean, do not see God! The mention of the sea, the standing emblem of unrest and rebellious power, suggests the "tumult of the peoples," on which similar repressive power is exercised. The great deeds of God, putting down tyranny and opposition to Israel, which is rebellion against Himself, strike terror, which is wholesome and is purified into reverence, into the distant lands; and so, from the place where the sun rises to the "sad-coloured end of evening" where it sinks in the west, *i.e.*, through all the earth, there rings out a shout of joy. Such glowing anticipations of universal results from the deeds of God, especially for Israel, are the products of diseased national vanity, unless they are God-taught apprehension of the Divine purpose of Israel's history, which shall one day be fulfilled, when the knowledge of the yet more wondrous deeds which culminated in the Cross is spread to the ends of the earth and the remotest seas.

God reveals Himself not only in the sanctities of His house, nor in His dread "signs" in nature and history,

but in the yearly recurring harvest, which was waving, as yet unreaped, while the poet sang. The local colouring which regards rain as the chief factor in fertility and the special gift of God is noticeable. In such a land as Palestine, irrigation seems the one thing needful to turn desert into fruitful field. To "water" the soil is there emphatically to "enrich" it. The psalmist uses for "river" the technical word for an irrigation cutting, as if he would represent God in the guise of the cultivator, who digs his ditches that the sparkling blessing may reach all his field. But what a difference between men-made watercourses and God's! The former are sometimes flooded, but often dry; His are full of water. The prose of the figure is, of course, abundant rain. It prepares the earth for the seed, and "so" in effect prepares the corn. The one is the immediate, the other the ultimate issue and purpose. Spring showers prepare autumn fruits. It is so in all regions of man's endeavour and of God's work; and it is practical wisdom to train ourselves to see the assurance of the end in His means, and to be confident that whatever His doings have a manifest tendency to effect shall one day be ripened and harvested. How lovingly and patiently the psalm represents the Divine Husbandman as attending to all the steps of the process needed for the great ingathering! He guides the showers, he fills the little valleys of the furrows, and smooths down the tiny hills of the intervening ridges. He takes charge of the germinating seed, and His sunshine smiles a benediction on the tender green blade, as it pricks through the earth which has been made soft enough for it to pierce from beneath. This unhesitating recognition of the direct action of God in all "natural" processes is the true point of view

from which to regard them. God is the only force; and His immediate action is present in all material changes. The Bible knows nothing of self-moving powers in nature, and the deepest conception of God's relations to things sensible knows as little. "There is no power but of God" is the last word of religion and of true philosophy.

The poet stands in the joyous time when all the beauty of summer flushes the earth, and the harvest is yet a hope, not a possibly disappointing reality. It is near enough to fill his song with exultation. It is far enough off to let him look on the whitened fields, and not on the bristly stubble. So he regards the "crown" as already set on a year of goodness. He sees God's chariot passing in triumph and blessing over the land, and leaving abundance wherever its wheel-tracks go. Out in the uncultivated prairie, where sweet grass unsown by man grows, is the flush of greenery, where, before the rain, was baked and gaping earth. The hills, that wear a girdle of forest trees half-way up towards their barren summits, wave their foliage, as if glad. The white fleeces of flocks are dotted over the vivid verdure of every meadow, and one cannot see the ground for the tall corn that stands waiting for the sickle, in each fertile plain. The psalmist hears a hymn of glad praise rising from all these happy and sunny things; and for its melody he hushes his own, that he and we may listen to

> "The fair music that all creatures make
> To their great Lord."

PSALM LXVI.

1 Shout joyfully to God, all the earth,
2 Harp [unto] the glory of His name,
Render glory [to Him by] His praise.
3 Say to God, How dread are Thy works!
For the greatness of Thy strength shall Thy enemies feign
[submission] to Thee.
4 All the earth shall bow down to Thee, and harp to Thee,
They shall harp [to] Thy name. Selah.

5 Come, and behold the deeds of God;
He is dread in His doing towards the sons of men.
6 He turned the sea to dry land,
They went through the river on foot,
There let us rejoice in Him.
7 He rules by His might for ever;
His eyes watch the nations,
The rebellious—let them not exalt themselves. Selah.

8 Bless our God, ye peoples,
And let the voice of His praise be heard!
9 Who has set our soul in life,
And has not let our foot slip.
10 For Thou hast proved us, O God,
Thou hast refined us, as silver is refined.
11 Thou hast brought us into the fortress-dungeon,
Thou hast laid a heavy burden on our loins.
12 Thou hast caused men to ride over our head,
We have come into the fire and into the water,
But Thou broughtest us out into abundance.

13 I will go into Thy house with burnt offerings,
I will render to Thee my vows,
14 Which my lips uttered,
And my mouth spoke, in my straits.

15 Burnt offerings of fatlings will I offer to Thee,
With the savour of rams,
I will offer bullocks with goats. Selah.

16 Come, hearken, and I will recount, all ye that fear God,
What He has done for my soul.
17 To Him did I cry with my mouth,
And a song extolling [Him] was [already] under my tongue.
18 If I had intended iniquity in my heart,
The Lord would not hear:
19 But surely God has heard,
He has attended to the voice of my prayer.
20 Blessed be God,
Who has not turned away my prayer, nor His loving-kindness from me.

THE most striking feature of this psalm is the transition from the plural "we" and "our," in vv. 1–12, to the singular "I" and "my," in vv. 13–20. Ewald supposes that two independent psalms have been united, but ver. 12 is as abrupt for an ending as ver. 13 is for a beginning; and the "Come, hear," of ver. 16 echoes the "Come, and see," of ver. 5. It is possible that "the 'I' of the second part is identical with the 'we' of the first; in other words, that the personified community speaks here" (Baethgen); but the supposition that the psalm was meant for public worship, and is composed of a choral and a solo part, accounts for the change of number. Such expressions as "my soul" and "my heart" favour the individual reference. Of course, the deliverance magnified by the single voice is the same as that celebrated by the loud acclaim of many tongues; but there is a different note in the praise of the former—there is a tone of inwardness in it, befitting individual appropriation of general blessings. To this highest point, that of the action of the single soul in taking the deliverances of the community for

its very own, and pouring out its own praise, the psalm steadily climbs. It begins with the widest outlook over "all the earth," summoned to ring forth joyous praise. It ends focussed to one burning point, in a heart fired by the thought that God "has not turned away his loving-kindness from *me*." So we learn how each single soul has to claim its several part in world-wide blessings, as each flower-calyx absorbs the sunshine that floods the pastures.

The psalm has no superscription of date or author, and no clue in its language to the particular deliverance that called it forth. The usual variety of conjectures have been hazarded. The defeat of Sennacherib occurs to some; the return from Babylon to others; the Maccabean period to yet another school of critics. It belongs to a period when Israel's world-significance and mission were recognised (which Cheyne considers a post-exilic feature, "Orig. of Psalt.," 176), and when the sacrificial worship was in full force; but beyond these there are no clear data for period of composition.

It is divided into five strophes, three of which are marked by Selah. That musical indication is wanting at the close of the third strophe (ver. 12), which is also the close of the first or choral part, and its absence may be connected with the transition to a single voice. A certain progress in thought is noticeable, as will appear as we proceed. The first strophe calls upon all the earth to praise God for His works. The special deeds which fire the psalmist are not yet mentioned, though they are present to his mind. The summons of the world to praise passes over into prophecy that it shall praise. The manifestation of God's character by act will win homage. The great thought that God has but to be truly known in order to be reverenced

is an axiom with this psalmist; and no less certain is he that such knowledge and such praise will one day fill the world. True, he discerns that submission will not always be genuine; for he uses the same word to express it as occurs in Psalm xviii. 44, which represents "feigned homage." Every great religious awakening has a fringe of adherents, imperfectly affected by it, whose professions outrun reality, though they themselves are but half conscious that they feign. But though this sobering estimate of the shallowness of a widely diffused recognition of God tones down the psalmist's expectations, and has been abundantly confirmed by later experience, his great hope remains as an early utterance of the conviction, which has gathered assurance and definiteness by subsequent Revelation, and is now familiar to all. The world is God's. His Self-revelation will win hearts. There shall be true submission and joyous praise, girdling the earth as it rolls. The psalmist dwells mainly on the majestic and awe-inspiring aspect of God's acts. His greatness of power bears down opposition. But the later strophes introduce other elements of the Divine nature and syllables of the Name, though the inmost secret of the "power of God" in the weakness of manhood and the all-conquering might of Love is not yet ripe for utterance.

The second strophe advances to a closer contemplation of the deeds of God, which the nations are summoned to behold. He is not only "dread" in His doings towards mankind at large, but Israel's history is radiant with the manifestation of His name, and that past lives on, so that ancient experiences give the measure and manner of to-day's working. The retrospect embraces the two standing instances of God's delivering help—the passage of the Red Sea and of

Jordan—and these are not dead deeds in a far-off century. For the singer calls on his own generation to rejoice "there" in Him. Ver. 6 *c* is by some translated as "There did we rejoice," and more accurately by others, "Let us rejoice." In the former case the essential solidarity of all generations of the nation is most vividly set forth. But the same idea is involved in the correct rendering, according to which the men of the psalmist's period are entitled and invoked to associate themselves in thought with that long-past generation, and to share in their joy, since they do possess the same power which wrought then. God's work is never antiquated. It is all a revelation of eternal activities. What He has been, He is. What He did, He does. Therefore faith may feed on all the records of old time, and expect the repetition of all that they contain. Such an application of history to the present makes the nerve of this strophe. For ver. 7, following on the retrospect, declares the perpetuity of God's rule, and that His eyes still keep an outlook, as a watchman on a tower might do, to mark the enemies' designs, in order that He may intervene, as of old, for His people's deliverance. He "looked forth upon the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of cloud" (Exod. xiv. 24). Thus He still marks the actions and plans of Israel's foes. Therefore it were wise for the "rebellious" not to rear their heads so high in opposition.

The third strophe comes still closer to the particular deliverance underlying the psalm. Why should all "peoples" be called upon to praise God for it? The psalmist has learned that Israel's history is meant to teach the world what God is, and how blessed it is to dwell under His wing. No exclusiveness taints

his enjoyment of special national privileges. He has reached a height far above the conceptions of the rest of the world in his day, and even in this day, except where the Christian conception of "humanity" has been heartily accepted. Whence came this width of view, this purifying from particularism, this anticipation by so many centuries of a thought imperfectly realised even now? Surely a man who in those days and with that environment could soar so high must have been lifted by something mightier than his own spirit. The details of the Divine dealings described in the strophe are of small consequence in comparison with its fixed expectation of the world's participation in Israel's blessings. The familiar figures for affliction reappear—namely, proving and refining in a furnace. A less common metaphor is that of being prisoned in a *dungeon*, as the word rendered "net" in the A.V. and R.V. probably means. Another peculiar image is that o ver. 12: "Thou hast caused men to ride over our head." The word for "men" here connotes feebleness and frailty, characteristics which make tyranny more intolerable; and the somewhat harsh metaphor is best explained as setting forth insolent and crushing domination, whether the picture intended is that of ruthless conquerors driving their chariots over their prone victims, or that of their sitting as an incubus on their shoulders and making them like beasts of burden. Fire and water are standing figures for affliction. With great force these accumulated symbols of oppression are confronted by one abrupt clause ending the strophe, and describing in a breath the perfect deliverance which sweeps them all away: "Thou broughtest us out into abundance." There is no need for the textual alteration of the last word into "a wide place" (Hupfeld),

a place of liberty (Cheyne), or freedom (Baethgen). The word in the received text is that employed in Psalm xxiii. 5. "My cup is *overfulness*" and "abundance" yields a satisfactory meaning here, though not closely corresponding to any of the preceding metaphors for affliction.

The fourth strophe (vv. 13–15) begins the solo part. It clothes in a garb appropriate to a sacrificial system the thought expressed in more spiritual dress in the next strophe, that God's deliverance should evoke men's praise. The abundance and variety of sacrifices named, and the fact that "rams" were not used for the offerings of individuals, seem to suggest that the speaker is, in some sense, representing the nation, and it has been supposed that he may be the high priest. But this is merely conjecture, and the explanation may be that there is a certain ideal and poetical tone over the representation, which does not confine itself to scrupulous accuracy.

The last strophe (vv. 16–20) passes beyond sacrificial symbols, and gives the purest utterance to the emotions and resolves which ought to well up in a devout soul on occasion of God's goodness. Not only does the psalmist teach us how each individual must take the general blessing for his very own—of which act the faith which takes the world's Christ for my Christ is the supreme example—but he teaches us that the obligation laid on all recipients of God's mercy is to tell it forth, and that the impulse is as certain to follow real reception as the command is imperative. Just as Israel received deliverances that the whole earth might learn how strong and gracious was Israel's God, we receive His blessings, and chiefly His highest gift of life in Christ, not only that we may live, but that, living,

we may "declare the works of the Lord." He has little possession of God's grace who has not felt the necessity of speech, and the impossibility of the lips being locked when the heart is full.

The psalmist tells his experience of God's answers to his prayer in a very striking fashion. Ver. 17 says that he cried to God; and while his uttered voice was supplication, the song extolling God for the deliverance asked was, as it were, lying under his tongue, ready to break forth,—so sure was he that his cry would be heard. That is a strong faith which prepares banners and music for the triumph before the battle is fought. It would be presumptuous folly, not faith, if it rested on anything less certain than God's power and will.

"I find David making a syllogism in mood and figure. . . . 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me: but verily God hath heard me; He hath attended to the voice of my prayer.' Now, I expected that David would have concluded thus: 'Therefore I regard not wickedness in my heart.' But far otherwise he concludes: 'Blessed be God, who hath not turned away my prayer, nor His mercy from me.' Thus David hath deceived but not wronged me. I looked that he should have clapped the crown on his own, and he puts it on God's head. I will learn this excellent logic." So says Fuller ("Good Thoughts in Bad Times," p. 34, Pickering's ed., 1841). No doubt, however, the psalmist means to suggest, though he does not state, that his prayer was sincere. There is no self-complacent attribution of merit to his supplication, in the profession that it was untainted by any secret, sidelong looking towards evil; and Fuller is right in emphasising the suppression of the statement. But even the appearance of such is avoided by the jet

of praise which closes the psalm. Its condensed brevity has induced some critics to mend it by expansion, as they regard it as incongruous to speak of turning away a man's prayer from himself. Some would therefore insert "from Him" after "my prayer," and others would expand still further by inserting an appropriate negative before "His loving-kindness." But the slight incongruity does not obscure the sense, and brings out strongly the flow of thought. So fully does the psalmist feel the connection between God's loving-kindness and his own prayer, that these are, as it were, smelted into one in his mind, and the latter is so far predominant in his thoughts that he is unconscious of the anomaly of his expression. To expand only weakens the swing of the words and the power of the thought. It is possible to tame lyric outbursts into accuracy at the cost of energy. Psalmists are not bound to be correct in style. Rivers wind; canals are straight.

PSALM LXVII.

1 God be gracious to us, and bless us,
And cause His face to shine among us; **Selah.**
2 That Thy way may be known upon earth,
Thy salvation among all nations.

3 Let peoples give Thee thanks, O God,
Let peoples, all of them, give Thee thanks.
4 Let tribes rejoice and shout aloud,
For Thou wilt judge peoples in equity,
And tribes on the earth wilt Thou lead. **Selah.**
5 Let peoples give Thee thanks, O God,
Let peoples, all of them, give Thee thanks.

6 The earth has yielded her increase:
May God, [even] our God, bless us!
7 May God bless us,
And may all the ends of the earth fear Him!

THIS little psalm condenses the dominant thought of the two preceding into a series of aspirations after Israel's blessing, and the consequent diffusion of the knowledge of God's way among all lands. Like Psalm lxv., it sees in abundant harvests a type and witness of God's kindness. But, whereas in Psalm lxv. the fields were covered with corn, here the increase has been gathered in. The two psalms may or may not be connected in date of composition as closely as these two stages of one harvest-time.

The structure of the psalm has been variously conceived. Clearly the Selahs do not guide as to divisions in the flow of thought. But it may be noted that the

seven verses in the psalm have each two clauses, with the exception of the middle one (ver. 4), which has three. Its place and its abnormal length mark it as the core, round which, as it were, the whole is built up. Further, it is as if encased in two verses (vv. 3, 5), which, in their four clauses, are a fourfold repetition of a single aspiration. These three verses are the heart of the psalm—the desire that all the earth may praise God, whose providence blesses it all. They are again enclosed in two strophes of two verses each (vv. 1, 2, and 6, 7), which, like the closer wrapping round the core, are substantially parallel, and, unlike it, regard God's manifestation to Israel as His great witness to the world. Thus, working outwards from the central verse, we have symmetry of structure, and intelligible progress and distinctness of thought.

Another point of difficulty is the rendering of the series of verbs in the psalm. Commentators are unanimous in taking those of ver. 1 as expressions of desire; but they bewilderingly diverge in their treatment of the following ones. Details of the divergent interpretations, or discussions of their reasons, cannot be entered on here. It may be sufficient to say that the adherence throughout to the optative rendering, admitted by all in ver. 1, gives a consistent colouring to the whole. It is arbitrary to vary the renderings in so short a psalm. But, as is often the case, the aspirations are so sure of their correspondence with the Divine purpose that they tremble on the verge of being prophecies, as, indeed, all wishes that go out along the line of God's "way" are. Every deep, God-inspired longing whispers to its utterer assurance that so it shall be; and therefore such desires have ever in them an element of fruition, and know nothing of the pain

of earthly wishes. They who stretch out empty hands to God never "gather dust and chaff."

The priestly blessing (Numb. vi. 24–26) moulds ver. 1, but with the substitution of *God* for *Jehovah*, and of "among us" for "upon us." The latter variation gives an impression of closer contact of men with the lustre of that Divine Light, and of yet greater condescension in God. The soul's longing is not satisfied by even the fullest beams of a Light that is fixed on high; it dares to wish for the stooping of the Sun to dwell among us. The singer speaks in the name of the nation; and, by using the priestly formula, claims for the whole people the sacerdotal dignity which belonged to it by its original constitution. He gives that idea its widest extension. Israel is the world's high priest, lifting up intercessions and holy hands of benediction for mankind. What self-effacement, and what profound insight into and sympathy with the mind of God breathe in that collocation of desires, in which the gracious lustre of God's face shining on us is longed for, chiefly that thence it may be reflected into the dark places of earth, to gladden sad and seeking eyes! This psalmist did not know in how true a sense the Light would come to dwell among men of Israel's race, and thence to flood the world; but his yearning is a foreshadowing of the spirit of Christianity, which forbids self-regarding monopoly of its blessings. If a man is "light in the Lord," he cannot but shine. "God hath shined into our hearts, that we may give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God." A Church illuminated with a manifestly Divine light is the best witness for God. Eyes which cannot look on the Sun may gaze at the clouds, which tone down its colourless radiance into purple and gold.

The central core of the psalm may either be taken as summons to the nations or as expression of desire for them. The depth of the longing or the stringency of the summons is wonderfully given by that fourfold repetition of the same words in vv. 3 and 5, with the emphatic "all of them" in the second clause of each. Not less significant is the use of three names for the aggregations of men—nations (ver. 2), peoples, and tribes. All are included, whatever bond knits them in communities, whatever their societies call themselves, however many they are. The very vagueness gives sublimity and universality. We can fill the vast outline drawn by these sweeping strokes; and wider knowledge should not be attended with narrowed desires, nor feebler confidence that the Light shall lighten every land. It is noticeable that in this central portion the deeds of God among the nations are set forth as the ground of their praise and joy in Him. Israel had the light of His face, and that would draw men to Him. But all peoples have the strength of His arm to be their defender, and the guidance of His hand by providences and in other ways unrecognised by them. The "judgments" here contemplated are, of course, not retribution for evil, but the aggregate of dealings by which God shows His sovereignty in all the earth. The psalmist does not believe that God's goodness has been confined to Israel, nor that the rest of the world has been left orphaned. He agrees with Paul, "That which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God manifested it to them."

The final strophe (vv. 6, 7) is substantially a repetition of vv. 1, 2, with the addition that a past fact is laid as the foundation of the desires or hopes of future blessings. "The earth has yielded her increase."

This may show that the psalm is a harvest hymn, but it does not necessarily imply this. The thought may have been born at any time. The singer takes the plain fact that, year by year, by mysterious quickening which he recognises as of God, the fertile earth "causes the things sown in it to bring forth and bud," as an evidence of Divine care and kindliness, which warrants the desire and the confidence that all blessings will be given. It seems a large inference from such a premise; but it is legitimate for those who recognise God as working in nature, and have eyes to read the parables amid which we live. The psalmist reminds God of His own acts, and, further, of His own name, and builds on these his petitions and his faith. Because He is "our God" He will bless us; and since the earth has, by His gift, "yielded her increase," He will give the better food which souls need. This the singer desires, not only because he and his brethren need it, but because a happy people are the best witnesses for a good King, and worshippers "satisfied with favour and full of the blessing of the Lord" proclaim most persuasively, "Taste, and see that God is good." This psalm is a truly missionary psalm, in its clear anticipation of the universal spread of the knowledge of God, in its firm grasp of the thought that the Church has its blessings in order to the evangelisation of the world, and in its intensity of longing that from all the ends of the earth a shout of praise may go up to the God who has sent some rays of His light into them all, and committed to His people the task of carrying a brighter illumination to every land.

PSALM LXVIII.

1 Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered,
And let them who hate Him flee before Him.
2 As smoke is whirled, whirl [them] away:
As wax melts before fire,
May the wicked perish before God!
3 But may the righteous rejoice [and] exult before God,
And be mirthful in joy.
4 Sing to God, harp [to] His name:
Throw up a way for Him who rides through the deserts;
[In] Jah is His name; and exult ye before Him;
5 The orphans' father and the widows' advocate,
God in His holy dwelling-place,
6 God, who makes the solitary to dwell in a home,
Who brings out the prisoners into prosperity:
Yet the rebellious inhabit a burnt-up land.

7 O God, at Thy going forth before Thy people,
At Thy marching through the wilderness; Selah.
8 The earth quaked, the heavens also dropped before God:
Yonder Sinai [quaked] before God, the God of Israel.
9 With a gracious rain, O God, Thou didst besprinkle Thine inheritance;
And [when it was] faint, Thou didst refresh it.
10 Thine assembly dwelt herein:
Thou didst prepare in Thy goodness for the poor, O God.

11 The Lord gives the word:
The women telling the good tidings are a great army.
12 Kings of armies flee, they flee:
And the home-keeping [woman] divides the spoil.
13 Will ye lie among the sheep-pens?
[Ye shall be as] the wings of a dove that is covered with silver, (?)
And her pinions with yellow gold.
14 When the Almighty scattered kings in it,
It snowed in Salmon.

15 A mountain of God is the mountain of Bashan,
A many-peaked mountain is the mountain of Bashan.
16 Why look ye with envy, O many-peaked mountains,
On the mountain which God has desired to dwell in?
Yea, God will abide in it for ever.
17 The chariots of God are myriads and myriads, thousands on thousands:
God is among them;
Sinai is in the sanctuary.
18 Thou hast ascended on high,
Thou hast led captive a band of captives,
Thou hast taken gifts among men,
Yea, even the rebellious shall dwell with Jah, God.

19 Blessed be the Lord!
Day by day He bears our burdens,
Even the God [who is] our salvation.
20 God is to us a God of deliverances,
And Jehovah the Lord has escape from death.
21 Yea, God will crush the head of His enemies,
The hairy skull of him that goes on in his guiltiness.
22 The Lord has said, From Bashan I will bring back,
I will bring back from the depths of the sea:
23 That thou mayest bathe thy foot in blood,
That the tongue of thy dogs may have its portion from the enemy.

24 They have seen Thy goings, O God,
The goings of my God, my King, into the sanctuary
25 Before go singers, after [come] those who strike the strings,
In the midst of maidens beating timbrels.
26 "In the congregations bless ye God,
The Lord, [ye who spring] from the fountain of Israel."
27 There was little Benjamin their ruler, (?)
The princes of Judah, their shouting multitude,
The princes of Zebulun, the princes of Naphtali.

28 Command, O God, Thy strength,
Show Thyself strong, O God, Thou that hast wrought for us.
29 From Thy temple above Jerusalem
Unto Thee shall kings bring presents.
30 Rebuke the beast of the reeds,
The herd of bulls, with the calves of the peoples;
Tread down those that have pleasure in silver; (?)
Scatter the peoples that delight in wars.

31 Great ones shall come from Egypt,
Cush shall quickly stretch out her hands to God.

32 Ye kingdoms of the earth, sing to God;
Harp [unto] the Lord; Selah.
33 To Him who rides on the heavens of heavens, [which are] of old;
Lo, He utters His voice, a voice of strength.
34 Ascribe to God strength,
Whose majesty is over Israel, and His strength in the clouds.
35 Dread [art Thou], O God, from Thy sanctuaries,
The God of Israel,
He gives strength and fulness of might to His people.
Blessed be God!

THIS superb hymn is unsurpassed, if not unequalled, in grandeur, lyric fire, and sustained rush of triumphant praise. It celebrates a victory; but it is the victory of the God who enters as a conqueror into His sanctuary. To that entrance (vv. 15–18) all the preceding part of the psalm leads up; and from it all the subsequent part flows down. The Exodus is recalled as the progress of a king at the head of his hosts, and old pæans re-echo. That dwelling of God in the sanctuary is "for ever." Therefore in the second part of the psalm (vv. 19–35) its consequences for the psalmist's generation and for the future are developed —Israel's deliverance, the conquest of the nations, and finally the universal recognition of God's sovereignty and ringing songs sent up to Him.

The Davidic authorship is set aside as impossible by most recent commentators, and there is much in the psalm which goes against it; but, on the other hand, the Syro-Ammonite war (2 Sam. xi.), in which the ark was taken into the field, is not unnaturally supposed by Delitzsch and others to explain the special reference to the entrance of God into the sanctuary. The numerous quotations and allusions

are urged as evidence of late date, especially the undeniable resemblance with Isaiah II. But the difficulty of settling which of two similar passages is original and which copy is great; and if by one critical canon such allusions are marks of lateness, by another, rugged obscurities, such as those with which this psalm bristles, are evidences of an early date.

The mention of only four tribes in ver. 27 is claimed as showing that the psalm was written when Judæa and Galilee were the only orthodox districts, and central Palestine was in the hands of the Samaritans. But could there be any talk of "princes of Zebulun and Naphtali" then? The exultant tone of the psalm makes its ascription to such a date as the age of the Ptolemies unlikely, when "Israel is too feeble, too depressed, to dream of self-defence; and, if God does not soon interpose, will be torn to pieces" (Cheyne, "Aids to the Devout Study," etc., 335).

To the present writer it does not appear that the understanding and enjoyment of this grand psalm depend so much on success in dating it as is supposed. It may be post-exilic. Whoever fused its reminiscences of ancient triumph into such a glowing outburst of exultant faith, his vision of the throned God and his conviction that ancient facts reveal eternal truths remain for all generations as an encouragement of trust and a prophecy of God's universal dominion.

The main division at ver. 18 parts the psalm into two equal halves, which are again easily subdivided into strophes.

The first strophe (vv. 1–6) may be regarded as introductory to the chief theme of the first half—namely, the triumphant march of the conquering God to His sanctuary. It consists of invocation to Him to arise,

and of summons to His people to prepare His way and to meet Him with ringing gladness. The ground of both invocation and summons is laid in an expansion of the meaning of His name as Helper of the helpless, Deliverer of the captive, righteous, and plentifully rewarding the proud doer. The invocation echoes the Mosaic prayer "when the ark set forward" (Numb. x. 35), with the alteration of the tense of the verb from a simple imperative into a precative future, and of "Jehovah" into God. This is the first of the quotations characteristic of the psalm, which is penetrated throughout with the idea that the deeds of the past are revelations of permanent relations and activities. The ancient history glows with present life. Whatever God has done He is doing still. No age of the Church needs to look back wistfully to any former, and say, "Where be all His wondrous works which our fathers have told us of?" The twofold conditions of God's intervention are, as this strophe teaches, Israel's cry to Him to arise, and expectant diligence in preparing His way. The invocation, which is half of Israel's means of insuring His coming, being a quotation, the summons to perform the other half is naturally regarded by the defenders of the post-exilic authorship as borrowed from Isaiah II. (*e.g.*, xl. 3, lvii. 14, lxii. 10), while the supporters of an earlier date regard the psalm as the primary passage from which the prophet has drawn.

God "arises" when He displays by some signal act His care for His people. That strong anthropomorphism sets forth the plain truth that there come crises in history, when causes, long silently working, suddenly produce their world-shaking effects. God has seemed to sit passive; but the heavens open, and all but blind eyes can see Him, standing ready to smite that He may

deliver. When He rises to His feet, the enemy scatters in panic. His presence revealed is enough. The emphatic repetition of "before" in these verses is striking, especially when fully rendered,—from His face (ver. 1); from the face of the fire (ver. 2); from the face of God (ver. 2); before His face (vv. 3, 4). To His foes that face is dreadful, and they would fain cower away from its light; His friends sun themselves in its brightness. The same fire consumes and vivifies. All depends on the character of the recipients. In the psalm "the righteous" are Israel, the ideal nation; the "wicked" are its heathen foes; but the principle underlying the fervid words demands a real assimilation of moral character to the Divine, as a condition of being at ease in the Light.

The "deserts" are, in consonance with the immediately following reminiscences, those of the Exodus. Hupfeld and those who discover in the psalm the hopes of the captives in Babylon, take them to be the waste wilderness stretching between Babylon and Palestine. But it is better to see in them simply a type drawn from the past, of guidance through any needs or miseries. Vv. 5, 6, draw out at length the blessed significance of the name Jah, in order to hearten to earnest desire and expectance of Him. They are best taken as in apposition with "Him" in ver. 4. Well may we exult before Him who is the orphans' father, the widows' advocate. There may be significance in the contrast between what He is "in His holy habitation" and when He arises to ride through the deserts. Even in the times when he seems to be far above, dwelling in the separation of His unapproachable holiness, He is still caring and acting for the sad and helpless. But when He comes forth, it is to make the

solitary to dwell in a home, to bring out prisoners into prosperity. Are these simply expressions for God's general care of the afflicted, like the former clauses, or do they point back to the Exodus? A very slight change in the text gives the reading, "Makes the solitary to return home"; but even without that alteration, the last clause of the verse is so obviously an allusion to the disobedient, "whose carcasses fell in the wilderness," that the whole verse is best regarded as pointing back to that time. The "home" to which the people were led is the same as the "prosperity" into which the prisoners are brought—namely, the rest and well-being of Canaan; while the fate of the "rebellious" is, as it ever is, to live and die amidst the drought-stricken barrenness which they have chosen.

With the second strophe (vv. 7–10) begins the historical retrospect, which is continued till, at the end of the fourth (ver. 18), God is enthroned in the sanctuary, there to dwell for ever. In the second strophe the wilderness life is described. The third (vv. 11–14) tells of the victories which won the land. The fourth triumphantly contrasts the glory of the mountain where God at last has come to dwell, with the loftier peaks across the Jordan on which no such lustre gleams.

Vv. 7, 8, are from Deborah's song, with slight omissions and alterations, notably of "Jehovah" into "God." The phrase "before" still rings in the psalmist's ears, and he changes Deborah's words, in the first clause of ver. 7, so as to give the picture of God marching in front of His people, instead of, as the older song represented Him, coming from the east, to meet them marching from the west. The majestic theophany at the giving of the Law is taken as the culmination of His manifestations in the wilderness. Vv. 9, 10, are

capable of two applications. According to one, they anticipate the chronological order, and refer to the fertility of the land, and the abundance enjoyed by Israel when established there. According to the other, they refer to the sustenance of the people in the wilderness. The former view has in its favour the ordinary use of "inheritance" for the land, the likelihood that "rain" should be represented as falling on soil rather than on people, and the apparent reference in "dwelt therein," to the settlement in Canaan. The objection to it is that reference to peaceful dwelling in the land is out of place, since the next strophe pictures the conquest. If, then, the verses belong to the age of wandering, to what do they refer? Hupfeld tries to explain the "rain" as meaning the manna, and, still more improbably, takes the somewhat enigmatical "assembly" of ver. 10 to mean (as it certainly does) "living creatures," and to allude (as it surely does not) to the quails that fell round the camp. Most commentators now agree in transferring "thine inheritance" to the first clause, and in understanding it of the people, not of the land. The verse is intelligible either as referring to gifts of refreshment of spirit and courage bestowed on the people, in which case "rain" is symbolical; or to actual rainfall during the forty years of desert life, by which sowing and reaping were made possible. The division of the verse as in our translation is now generally adopted. The allusion to the provision of corn in the desert is continued in ver. 10, in which the chief difficulty is the ambiguous word "assembly." It may mean "living creatures," and is so taken here by the LXX. and others. It is twice used in 2 Sam. xxii. 11 (?), 13, for an army. Delitzsch atkes it as a comparison of Israel to a flock, thus

retaining the meaning of *creatures*. If the verse is interpreted as alluding to Israel's wilderness life, "therein" must be taken in a somewhat irregular construction, since there is no feminine noun at hand to which the feminine pronominal suffix in the word can be referred. In that barren desert, God's flock dwelt for more than a generation, and during all that time His goodness provided for them. The strophe thus gives two aspects of God's manifestation in the wilderness—the majestic and terrible, and the gentle and beneficent. In the psalmist's triumphant retrospect no allusion is made to the dark obverse—Israel's long ingratitude. The same history which supplies other psalmists and prophets with material for penetrating accusations yields to this one only occasion of praise. God's part is pure goodness; man's is shaded with much rebellious murmuring.

The next strophe (vv. 11–14) is abrupt and disconnected, as if echoing the hurry of battle and the tumult of many voices on the field. The general drift is unmistakable, but the meaning of part is the despair of commentators. The whole scene of the conflict, flight, and division of the spoil is flashed before us in brief clauses, panting with excitement and blazing with the glow of victory. "The Lord giveth the word." That "word" may be the news which the women immediately repeat. But it is far more vivid and truer to the spirit of the psalm, which sees God as the only actor in Israel's history, to regard it as the self-fulfilling decree which scatters the enemy. This battle is the Lord's. There is no description of conflict. But one mighty word is hurled from heaven, like a thunder-clap (the phrase resembles that employed so often, "the Lord gave His voice," which frequently means thunder-

peals), and the enemies' ranks are broken in panic. Israel does not need to fight. God speaks, and the next sound we hear is the clash of timbrels and the clear notes of the maidens chanting victory. This picture of a battle, with the battle left out, tells best Who fought, and how He fought it. "He spake, and it was done." What scornful picture of the flight is given by the reduplication "they flee, they flee"! It is like Deborah's fierce gloating over the dead Sisera: "He bowed, he fell, he lay: at her feet he bowed, he fell: where he bowed, there he fell." What confidence in the power of weakness, when God is on its side, in the antithesis between the mighty kings scattered in a general *sauve qui peut*, and the matrons who had "tarried at home" and now divide the spoil! Sisera's mother was pictured in Deborah's song as looking long through her lattice for her son's return, and solacing herself with the thought that he delayed to part the plunder and would come back laden with it. What she vainly hoped for Israel's matrons enjoy.

Vv. 13, 14, are among the hardest in the Psalter. The separate clauses offer no great difficulties, but the connection is enigmatical indeed. "Will (lit. *if*) ye lie among the sheepfolds?" comes from Deborah's song (Judg. v. 16), and is there a reproach flung at Reuben for preferring pastoral ease to warlike effort. Is it meant as reproach here? It is very unlikely that a song of triumph like this should have for its only mention of Israel's warriors a taunt. The lovely picture of the dove with iridescent wings is as a picture perfect. But what does it mean here? Herder, whom Hupfeld follows, supposes that the whole verse is rebuke to recreants, who preferred lying stretched at ease among their flocks, and bidding each

other admire the glancing plumage of the doves that flitted round them. But this is surely violent, and smacks of modern æstheticism. Others suppose that the first clause is a summons to be up and pursue the flying foe, and the second and third a description of the splendour with which the conquerors (or their households) should be clothed by the spoil. This meaning would require the insertion of some such phrase as "ye shall be" before the second clause. Delitzsch regards the whole as a connected description of the blessings of peace following on victory, and sees a reference to Israel as God's dove. "The new condition of prosperity is compared with the play of colours of a dove basking in the rays of the sun." All these interpretations assume that Israel is addressed in the first clause. But is this assumption warranted? Is it not more natural to refer the "ye" to the "kings" just mentioned, especially as the psalmist recurs to them in the next verse? The question will then retain the taunting force which it has in Deborah's song, while it pictures a very different kind of couching among the sheepfolds—namely, the hiding there from pursuit. The kings are first seen in full flight. Then the triumphant psalmist flings after them the taunt, "Will ye hide among the cattle?" If the initial particle retains its literal force, the first clause is hypothetical, and the suppression of the conclusion speaks more eloquently than its expression would have done: "If ye couch——" The second and third clauses are then parallel with the second of ver. 12, and carry on the description of the home-keeping matron, "the dove," adorned with rich spoils and glorious in her apparel. We thus have a complete parallelism between the two verses, which both lay side by side the contrasted pictures of the

defeated kings and the women; and we further establish continuity between the three verses (13–15), in so far as the "kings" are dealt with in them all.

Ver. 14 is even harder than the preceding. What does "in it" refer to? Is the second clause metaphor, requiring to be eked out with "It is like as when"? If figure, what does it mean? One is inclined to say with Baethgen, at the end of his comment on the words, "After all this, I can only confess that I do not understand the verse." Salmon was an inconsiderable hill in Central Palestine, deriving its name (Shady), as is probable, from forests on its sides. Many commentators look to that characteristic for explanation of the riddle. Snow on the dark hill would show very white. So after the defeat the bleached bones of the slain, or, as others, their glittering armour, would cover the land. Others take the point of comparison to be the change from trouble to joy which follows the foe's defeat, and is likened to the change of the dark hillside to a gleaming snow-field. Hupfeld still follows Herder in connecting the verse with the reproach which he finds in the former one, and seeing in the words "It snowed on Salmon" the ground of the recreants' disinclination to leave the sheepfolds—namely, that it was bad weather, and that, if snow lay on Salmon in the south, it would be worse in the north, where the campaign was going on! He acknowledges that this explanation requires "a good deal of acuteness to discover," and says that the only alternative to accepting it, provisionally, at all events, is to give up the hope of any solution. Cheyne follows Bickell in supposing that part of the text has dropped out, and proposes an additional clause at the beginning of the verse and an expansion of the last clause, arriving at this result: "[For full is our land of

spoil], When Shaddai scatters kings therein, [As the snow,] when it snows in Salmon." The adoption of these additions is not necessary to reach this meaning of the whole, which appears the most consonant with the preceding verses, as continuing the double reference which runs through them—namely, to the fugitive kings and the dividers of the spoil. On the one side we see the kings driven from their lurking-places among the sheepfolds; on the other, the gleam of rich booty, compared now to the shining white wrapping the dark hill, as formerly to the colours that shimmer on sunlit pinions of peaceful doves. If this is not the meaning, we can only fall back on the confession already quoted.

The battle is over, and now the Conqueror enters His palace-temple. The third strophe soars with its theme, describing His triumphal entry thither and permanent abiding there. The long years between the conquest of Canaan and the establishment of the ark on Zion dwindle to a span; for God's enthronement there was in one view the purpose of the conquest, which was incomplete till that was effected. There is no need to suppose any reference in the mention of Bashan to the victories over Og, its ancient king. The noble figure needs no historic allusion to explain it. These towering heights beyond Jordan had once in many places been seats of idol worship. They are emblems of the world's power. No light rests upon them, lofty though they are, like that which glorifies the insignificant top of Zion. They may well look enviously across the Jordan to the hill which God has desired for His abode. His triumphal procession is not composed of earthly warriors, for none such had appeared in the battle. He had conquered, not by employing human hands, but by His own "bright-harnessed angels." They now

surround Him in numbers innumerable, which language strains its power in endeavouring to reckon. "Myriads doubled, thousands of repetition," says the psalmist —indefinite expressions for a countless host. But all their wide-flowing ranks are clustered round the Conqueror, whose presence makes their multitude an unity, even as it gives their immortal frames their life and strength, and their faces all their lustrous beauty. "God is in the midst of them"; therefore they conquer and exult. "Sinai is in the sanctuary." This bold utterance has led to a suggested emendation, which has the advantage of bringing out clearly a quotation from Deut. xxxiii. 2. It combines the second and third clauses of ver. 17, and renders "The Lord hath come from Sinai into the sanctuary." But the existing text gives a noble thought—that now, by the entrance of God thither, Sinai itself is in the sanctuary, and all the ancient sanctities and splendours, which flamed round its splintered peaks, are housed to shine lambent from that humble hill. Sinai was nothing but for God's presence. Zion has that presence; and all that it ever meant it means still. The profound sense of the permanent nature of past revelation, which speaks all through the psalm, reaches its climax here.

The "height" to which ver. 18 triumphantly proclaims that God has gone up, can only be Zion. To take it as meaning the heavenly sanctuary, as in Psalm vii. 7 it unquestionably does, is forbidden by the preceding verses. Thither the conquering God has ascended, as to His palace, leading a long procession of bound captives, and there receiving tribute from the vanquished. Assyrian slabs and Egyptian paintings illustrate these representations. The last clause has been variously construed and understood. Is "Yea, even

the rebellious" to be connected with the preceding, and "among" to be supplied, so that those once rebellious are conceived of as tributary, or does the phrase begin an independent clause? The latter construction makes the remainder of the verse run more intelligibly, and obviates the need for supplying a preposition with "the rebellious." It still remains a question whether the last words of the clause refer to God's dwelling among the submissive rebels, or to their dwelling with God. If, however, it is kept in view that the context speaks of God as dwelling in His sanctuary, the latter is the more natural explanation, especially as a forcible contrast is thereby presented to the fate of the "rebellious" in ver. 6. They dwell in a burnt-up land; but, if they fling away their enmity, may be guests of God in His sanctuary. Thus the first half of the psalm closes with grand prophetic hopes that, when God has established His abode on Zion, distant nations shall bring their tribute, rebels return to allegiance, and men be dwellers with God in His house.

In such anticipations the psalm is Messianic, inasmuch as these are only fulfilled in the dominion of Jesus. Paul's quotation of this verse in Eph. iv. 8 does not require us to maintain its directly prophetic character. Rather, the apostle, as Calvin says, "deflects" it to Christ. That ascent of the ark to Zion was a type rather than a prophecy. Conflict, conquest, triumphant ascent to a lofty home, tribute, widespread submission, and access for rebels to the royal presence—all these, which the psalmist saw as facts or hopes in their earthly form, are repeated in loftier fashion in Christ, or are only attainable through His universal reign. The apostle significantly alters "received among" into "gave to," sufficiently showing that he is not arguing

from a verbal prophecy, but from a typical fact, and bringing out the two great truths, that, in the highest manifestation of the conquering God, the conquered receive gifts from the victor, and that the gifts which the ascended Christ bestows are really the trophies of His battle, in which He bound the strong man and spoiled his house. The attempt to make out that the Hebrew word has the extraordinary doubled-barrelled meaning of *receiving in order to give* is futile, and obscures the intentional freedom with which the apostle deals with the text. The Ascension is, in the fullest sense, the enthronement of God; and its results are the growing submission of nations and the happy dwelling of even the rebellious in His house.

The rapturous emphasis with which this psalm celebrates God's entrance into His sanctuary is most appropriate to Davidic times.

The psalm reaches its climax in God's enthronement on Zion. Its subsequent strophes set forth the results thereof. The first of these, the fifth of the psalm (vv. 19–23), suddenly drops from strains of exultation to a plaintive note, and then again as suddenly breaks out into stern rejoicing over the ruin of the foe. There is wonderful depth of insight and tenderness in laying side by side the two thoughts of God, that He sits on high as conqueror, and that He daily bears our burdens, or perhaps bears us as a shepherd might his lambs.

Truly a Divine use for Divine might! To such lowly offices of continual individualising care will the Master of many legions stoop, reaching out from amid their innumerable myriads to sustain a poor weak man stumbling under a load too great for him. Israel had been delivered by a high hand, but still was burdened. The psalmist has been recalling the deeds of old, and

he finds in them grounds for calm assurance as to the present. To-day, he thinks, is as full of God as any yesterday, and our "burdens" as certain to be borne by Him, as were those of the generation that saw His Sinai tremble at His presence. To us, as to them, He is "a God of deliverances," and for us can provide ways of escape from death. The words breathe a somewhat plaintive sense of need, such as shades our brightest moments, if we bethink ourselves; but they do not oblige us to suppose that the psalm is the product of a time of oppression and dejection. That theory is contradicted by the bounding gladness of the former part, no less than by the confident anticipations of the second half. But no song sung by mortal lips is true to the singer's condition, if it lacks the minor key into which this hymn of triumph is here modulated for a moment.

It is but for a moment, and what follows is startlingly different. Israel's escape from death is secured by the destruction of the enemy, and in it the psalmist has joy. He pictures the hand that sustained him and his fellows so tenderly, shattering the heads of the rebellious. These are described as long-haired, an emblem of strength and insolence which one is almost tempted to connect with Absalom; and the same idea of determined and flaunting sin is conveyed by the expression "goes on in his guiltinesses." There will be such rebels, even though the house of God is open for them to dwell in, and there can be but one end for such. If they do not submit, they will be crushed. The psalmist is as sure of that as of God's gentleness; and his two clauses do state the alternative that every man has to face—either to let God bear his burden or to be smitten by Him.

Vv. 22, 23, give a terrible picture of the end of the rebels. The psalmist hears the voice of the Lord promising to bring some unnamed fugitives from Bashan and the depths of the sea in order that they may be slain, and that he (or Israel) may bathe his foot in their blood, and his dogs may lick it, as they did Ahab's. Who are to be brought back? Some have thought that the promise referred to Israel, but it is more natural to apply it to the flying foe. There is no reference to Bashan either as the kingdom of an ancient enemy or as envying Zion (ver. 15). But the high land of Bashan in the east and the depths of the sea to the west are taken (*cf.* Amos ix. 1–3) as representing the farthest and most inaccessible hiding-places. Wherever the enemies lurk, thence they will be dragged and slain.

The existing text is probably to be amended by the change of one letter in the verb, so as to read "shall wash" or bathe, as in Psalm lviii. 10, and the last clause to be read, "That the tongue of thy dogs may have its portion from the enemy." The blood runs ankle-deep, and the dogs feast on the carcasses or lick it—a dreadful picture of slaughter and fierce triumph. It is not to be softened or spiritualised or explained away.

There is, no doubt, a legitimate Christian joy in the fall of opposition to Christ's kingdom, and the purest benevolence has sometimes a right to be glad when hoary oppressions are swept away and their victims set free; but such rejoicing is not after the Christian law unless it is mingled with pity, of which the psalm has no trace.

The next strophe (vv. 24–27) is by some regarded as resuming the description of the procession, which is supposed to have been interrupted by the preceding

strophe. But the joyous march now to be described is altogether separate from the majestic progress of the conquering King in vv. 17, 18. This is the consequence of that. God has gone into His sanctuary. His people have seen His solemn entrance thither, and therefore they now go up to meet Him there with song and music. Their festal procession is the second result of His enthronement, of which the deliverance and triumph described in the preceding strophe were the first. The people escaped from death flock to thank their Deliverer. Such seems to be the connection of the whole, and especially of vv. 24, 25. Instead of myriads of angels surrounding the conquering God, here are singers and flute-players and damsels beating their timbrels, like Miriam and her choir. Their shrill call in ver. 26 summons all who "spring from the fountain of Israel"—*i.e.*, from the eponymous patriarch—to bless God. After these musicians and singers, the psalmist sees tribe after tribe go up to the sanctuary, and points to each as it passes. His enumeration is not free from difficulties, both in regard to the epithets employed and the specification of the tribes. The meaning of the word rendered "ruler" is disputed. Its form is peculiar, and the meaning of the verb from which it is generally taken to come is rather to *subdue* or *tread down* than to *rule*. If the signification of *ruler* is accepted, a question rises as to the sense in which Benjamin is so called. Allusion to Saul's belonging to that tribe is thought of by some; but this seems improbable, whether the psalm is Davidic or later. Others think that the allusion is to the fact that, according to Joshua xviii. 16, the Temple was within Benjamite territory; but that is a far-fetched explanation. Others confine the "rule" to the procession, in which

Benjamin marches at the head, and so may be called its leader; but ruling and leading are not the same. Others get a similar result by a very slight textual change, reading "in front" instead of "their ruler." Another difficulty is in the word rendered above "their shouting multitude," which can only be made to mean a company of people by a somewhat violent twist. Hupfeld (with whom Bickell and Cheyne agree) proposes an alteration which yields the former sense and is easy. It may be tentatively adopted.

A more important question is the reason for the selection of the four tribes named. The mention of Benjamin and Judah is natural; but why are Zebulun and Naphtali the only representatives of the other tribes? The defenders of a late date answer, as has been already noticed, Because in the late period when the psalm was written, Galilee and Judæa "formed the two orthodox provinces." The objection to this is that in the post-exilic period there were no distinct tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali, and no princes to rule.

The mention of these tribes as sharing in the procession to the sanctuary on Zion would have been impossible during the period of the northern kingdom. If, then, these two periods are excluded, what is left but the Davidic? The fact seems to be that we have here another glance at Deborah's song, in which the daring valour of these two tribes is set in contrast with the sluggish cowardice of Reuben and the other northern ones. Those who had done their part in the wars of the Lord now go up in triumph to His house. That is the reward of God's faithful soldiers.

The next strophe (vv. 28–31) is the prayer of the procession. It falls into two parts of two verses each, of which the former verse is petition, and the latter

confident anticipation of the results of answered prayer The symmetry of the whole requires the substitution in ver. 28 of "command" for "hath commanded." God's strength is poetically regarded as distinct from Himself and almost personified, as "loving-kindness" is in Psalm xlii. 8. The prayer is substantially equivalent to the following petition in ver. 28 *b*. Note how "strength" occurs four times in vv. 33–35. The prayer for its present manifestation is, in accordance with the historical retrospect of the first part, based upon God's past acts. It has been proposed to detach "From Thy Temple" from ver. 29, and to attach it to ver. 28. This gets over a difficulty, but unduly abbreviates ver. 29, and is not in harmony with the representation in the former part, which magnifies what God has wrought, not "from the Temple," but in His progress thither. No doubt the retention of the words in ver. 29 introduces a singular expression there. How can presents be brought to God "from Thy Temple"? The only explanation is that "Temple" is used in a restricted sense for the "holy place," as distinguished from the "holy of holies," in which the ark was contained. The tribute-bearers stand in that outer sanctuary, and thence present their tokens of fealty. The city is clustered round the Temple mount, and therefore the psalm says, "Thy Temple above Jerusalem." One is tempted to read "unto" instead of "from"; for this explanation can scarcely be called quite satisfactory. But it seems the best that has been suggested. The submission of kings of unnamed lands is contemplated as the result of God's manifestation of strength for Israel. Ver. 30 resumes the tone of petition, and maintains it throughout. "The beast of the reeds," probably the crocodile, is a poetic

designation for Egypt, the reference to which is claimed by both the defenders of the Davidic and of the post-exilic date as in their favour. The former say that, in David's day, Egypt was the greatest world-power known to the Hebrews; and the latter, that the mention of it points to the time when Israel lay exposed to the attacks of Seleucidæ on the one hand and of Ptolemies on the other. Why, then, should only one of the two hostile neighbours be mentioned here? "Bulls" are a standing emblem of leaders of nations, and "calves" are accordingly their subjects. The two metaphors are naturally connected, and the correction "leaders of the peoples" is unnecessary, and a prosaic intermingling of figure and fact.

Ver. 30*c* is extremely obscure. Baethgen roundly says, "The meaning of the words can no longer be ascertained, and in all probability they are corrupt." The first word is a participle, which is variously taken as meaning "casting oneself to the ground" (*i.e.*, in submission), and "trampling to the ground." It is also variously referred to the nations and their leaders spoken of in the previous verse, and to God. In the former case it would describe their attitude of submission in consequence of "rebuke"; in the latter, God's subjugation of them. The slightest change would make the word an imperative, thus bringing it into line with "rebuke"; but, even without this, the reference to God is apparently to be preferred. The structure of the strophe which, in the first verse of each pair, seems to put petitions and to confine its descriptions of the resulting subjugation of the enemy to the second verse in each case, favours the latter interpretation. The next words are also disputed. One rendering is, "with bars of silver"; another,

"those that delight in silver." The former presupposes a very unusual word for "bars." It is necessarily adopted by those who refer the first word to the submission of the "herd of bulls." The enemies come with tribute of silver. The other rendering, which avoids the necessity of bringing in an otherwise unknown word, is necessarily preferred by the supporters of the second explanation of the preceding word. God is implored to crush "those who delight in silver," which may stand for a description of men of this world, but must be acknowledged to be rather a singular way of designating active enemies of God and Israel. Cheyne's rendering, "That rolls itself in mire for gain of money," brings in the mercenaries of the Seleucidæ. But "rolling oneself in mire" is a strange way of saying "hiring oneself out to fight." Certainty seems unattainable, and we must be content with the general trend of the verse as supplication for an exhibition of God's strength against proud opponents. The last clause sums up the whole in the petition, "Scatter the peoples that delight in wars."

One verse then tells what the result of that will be. "Great ones" shall come from the land of the beast of the reeds, and Ethiopia shall make haste to stretch out tribute-bearing hands to God. The vision of a world subjugated and loving its subjugation is rising before the poet. That is the end of the ways of God with Israel. So deeply had this psalmist been led into comprehension of the Divine purpose; so clearly was he given to see the future, "and all the wonder that should be."

Therefore he breaks forth, in the last strophe, into invocation to all the kingdoms of the earth to sing to God. He had sung of His majesty as of old Jehovah

"rode through the deserts"; and that phrase described His intervention in the field of history on behalf of Israel. Now the singer calls for praise from all the earth to Him who rides in the "most ancient heavens"; and that expression sets forth His transcendent majesty and eternal, universal sway. The psalmist had hymned the victory won when "God gave the word." Now he bids earth listen as "He gives His voice, a voice of strength," which moves and controls all creatures and events. Therefore all nations are summoned to give strength to God, who gives all fulnesses of strength to His people. The psalm closes with the utterance of the thought which has animated it throughout—that God's deeds for and in Israel are the manifestation for the world of His power, and that these will one day lead all men to bless the God of Israel, who shines out in dread majesty from the sanctuary, which is henceforth His abode for evermore.

PSALM LXIX.

1 Save me, O God;
For the waters have come in even to [my] soul.
2 I am sunk in the mud of an abyss, without standing-ground
I am come into depths of waters, and a flood has overwhelmed me.
3 I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched,
My eyes fail whilst I wait for my God.
4 More than the hairs of my head are they who hate me without provocation.
Strong are my destroyers, my enemies wrongfully.
What I did not rob, then I must restore.
5 O God, Thou, Thou knowest my folly,
And my guiltinesses are not hidden from Thee.
6 Let not those who wait for Thee be put to shame through me, Lord, Jehovah of hosts:
Let not those be confounded through me who seek Thee, O God of Israel.

7 For Thy sake have I borne reproach;
Confusion has covered my face.
8 I have become a stranger to my brothers,
And an alien to my mother's sons.
9 For zeal for Thine house has consumed me,
And the reproaches of those that reproach Thee have fallen upon me.
10 And I wept, in fasting my soul [wept];
And that became [matter of] reproaches to me.
11 Also I made sackcloth my clothing;
And I became to them a proverb.
12 They who sit at the gate talk of me,
And the songs of the quaffers of strong drink [are about me].

13 But as for me, my prayer is unto Thee, Jehovah, in a time of favour,
O God, in the greatness of Thy loving-kindness,
Answer me in the troth of Thy salvation.

14 Deliver me from [the] mire, that I sink not,
Rescue me from those who hate me, and from depths of waters.
15 Let not the flood of waters overwhelm me,
And let not the abyss swallow me,
And let not [the] pit close her mouth over me.
16 Answer me, Jehovah; for Thy loving-kindness is good:
In the multitude of Thy compassions turn toward me.
17 And hide not Thy face from Thy servant,
For I am in straits; answer me speedily.
18 Draw near to my soul, redeem it,
Because of my enemies set me free.

19 Thou, Thou knowest my reproach, and my shame, and my confusion.
Before Thee are all my adversaries.
20 Reproach has broken my heart; and I am sick unto death,
And I looked for pitying, and there was none,
And for comforters, and found none.
21 But they gave me gall for my food,
And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.

22 Let their table become before them a snare,
And to them in their peacefulness, [let it become] a trap.
23 Darkened be their eyes, that they see not,
And make their loins continually to quake.
24 Pour out upon them Thine indignation,
And let the glow of Thy wrath overtake them.
25 May their encampment be desolate!
In their tents may there be no dweller!
26 For him whom Thou, Thou hast smitten, they persecute,
And they tell of the pain of Thy wounded ones.
27 Add iniquity to their iniquity,
And let them not come into Thy righteousness.
28 Let them be blotted out of the book of the living,
And let them not be inscribed with the righteous.

29 But as for me, I am afflicted and pained,
Let Thy salvation, O God, set me on high.
30 I will praise the name of God in a song,
And I will magnify it with thanksgiving.
31 And it shall please Jehovah more than an ox,
A bullock horned and hoofed.

32 The afflicted see it; they shall rejoice,
Ye who seek God, [behold,] and let your heart live.

33 For Jehovah listens to the needy,
And His captives He does not despise.
34 Let heaven and earth praise Him,
The seas, and all that moves in them.
35 For God will save Zion, and build the cities of Judah,
And they shall dwell there, and possess it.
36 And the seed of His servants shall inherit it,
And those who love His name shall abide therein.

THE Davidic authorship of this psalm is evidently untenable, if for no other reason, yet because of the state of things presupposed in ver. 35. The supposition that Jeremiah was the author has more in its favour than in the case of many of the modern attributions of psalms to him, even if, as seems most probable, the references to sinking in deep mire and the like are metaphorical. Cheyne fixes on the period preceding Nehemiah's first journey to Jerusalem as the earliest possible date for this psalm and its kindred ones (xxii., xxxv., and xl. 13–18). Baethgen follows Olshausen in assigning the psalm to the Maccabean period. The one point which seems absolutely certain is that David was not its author.

It falls into two equal parts (vv. 1–18 and 19–36). In the former part three turns of thought or feeling may be traced: vv. 1–6 being mainly a cry for Divine help, with plaintive spreading out of the psalmist's extremity of need; vv. 7–12 basing the prayer on the fact that his sufferings flow from his religion; and vv. 13–18 being a stream of petitions for deliverance, with continuous allusion to the description of his trials in vv. 1–6. The second part (vv. 19–36) begins with renewed description of the psalmist's affliction (vv. 19–21), and thence passes to invocation of God's justice on his foes (vv. 22–28), which takes the place of the direct petitions for deliverance in the

first part. The whole closes with trustful anticipation of answers to prayer, which will call forth praise from ever-widening circles,—first from the psalmist himself; then from the oppressed righteous; and, finally, from heaven, earth, and sea.

The numerous citations of this psalm in the New Testament have led many commentators to maintain its directly Messianic character. But its confessions of sin and imprecations of vengeance are equally incompatible with that view. It is Messianic as typical rather than as prophetic, exhibiting a history, whether of king, prophet, righteous man, or personified nation, in which the same principles are at work as are manifest in their supreme energy and highest form in the Prince of righteous sufferers. But the correspondence of such a detail as giving gall and vinegar, with the history of Jesus, carries us beyond the region of types, and is a witness that God's Spirit shaped the utterances of the psalmist for a purpose unknown to himself, and worked in like manner on the rude soldiers, whose clumsy mockery and clumsy kindness fulfilled ancient words. There is surely something more here than coincidence or similarity between the experience of one righteous sufferer and another. If Jesus cried "I thirst" in order to bring about the "fulfilment" of one verse of our psalm, His doing so is of a piece with some other acts of His which were distinct claims to be the Messiah of prophecy; but His wish could not influence the soldiers to fulfil the psalm.

The first note is petition and spreading out of the piteous story of the psalmist's need. The burdened heart finds some ease in describing how heavy its burden is, and the devout heart receives some foretaste of longed-for help in the act of telling God how sorely

His help is needed. He who knows all our trouble is glad to have us tell it to Him, since it is thereby lightened, and our faith in Him is thereby increased. Sins confessed are wholly cancelled, and troubles spoken to God are more than half calmed. The psalmist begins with metaphors in vv. 1, 2, and translates these into grim prose in vv. 3, 4, and then, with acknowledgment of sinfulness, cries for God's intervention in vv. 5, 6. It is flat and prosaic to take the expressions in vv. 1, 2, literally, as if they described an experience like Jeremiah's in the miry pit. Nor can the literal application be carried through; for the image of "waters coming in unto the soul" brings up an entirely different set of circumstances from that of sinking in mud in a pit. The one describes trouble as rushing in upon a man, like a deluge which has burst its banks and overwhelms him; the other paints it as yielding and tenacious, affording no firm spot to stand on, but sucking him up in its filthy, stifling slime. No water was in Jeremiah's pit. The two figures are incompatible in reality, and can only be blended in imagination. What they mean is put without metaphor in vv. 3, 4. The psalmist is "weary with calling" on God; his throat is dry with much prayer; his eyes ache and are dim with upward gazing for help which lingers. Yet he does not cease to call, and still prays with his parched throat, and keeps the weary eyes steadfastly fixed, as the psalm shows. It is no small triumph of patient faith to wait for tarrying help. Ver. 4 tells why he thus cries. He is compassed by a crowd of enemies. Two things especially characterise these—their numbers, and their gratuitous hatred. As to the former, they are described as more numerous than the hairs of the psalmist's head. The parallelism of clauses recommends

the textual alteration which substitutes for the unnecessary word "my destroyers" the appropriate expression "more than my bones," which is found in some old versions. Causeless hatred is the portion of the righteous in all ages; and our Lord points to Himself as experiencing it in utmost measure (John xv. 25), inasmuch as He, the perfectly righteous One, must take into His own history all the bitterness which is infused into the cup of those who fear God and love the right by a generation who are out of sympathy with them.

The same experience, in forms varying according to the spirit of the times, is realised still in all who have the mind of Christ in them. As long as the world is a world, it will have some contempt mingling with its constrained respect for goodness, some hostility, now expressed by light shafts of mockery and ridicule, now by heavier and more hurtful missiles, for Christ's true servants. The ancient "Woe" for those of whom "all men speak well" is in force to-day. The "hatred" is "without a cause," in so far as its cherishers have received no hurt, and its objects desire only their enemies' good; but its cause lies deep in the irreconcilable antagonism of life-principles and aims between those who follow Christ and those who do not.

The psalmist had to bear unjust charges, and to make restitution of what he had never taken. Causeless hatred justified itself by false accusations, and innocence had but to bear silently and to save life at the expense of being robbed in the name of justice.

He turns from enemies to God. But his profession of innocence assumes a touching and unusual form. He does not, as might be expected, say, "Thou knowest my guiltlessness," but, "Thou knowest my foolishness." A true heart, while conscious of innocence in regard

to men, and of having done nothing to evoke their enmity, is, even in the act of searching itself, arrested by the consciousness of its many sins in God's sight, and will confess these the more penitently, because it stands upright before men, and asserts its freedom from all crime against them. In so far as men's hatred is God's instrument, it inflicts merited chastisement. That does not excuse men; but it needs to be acknowledged by the sufferer, if things are to be right between him and God. Then, after such confession, he can pray, as this psalmist does, that God's mercy may deliver him, so that others who, like him, wait on God may not be disheartened or swept from their confidence, by the spectacle of his vain hopes and unanswered cries. The psalmist has a strong consciousness of his representative character, and, as in so many other psalms, thinks that his experience is of wide significance as a witness for God. This consciousness points to something special in his position, whether we find the speciality in his office, or in the supposed personification of the nation, or in poetic consciousness heightened by the sense of being an organ of God's Spirit. In a much inferior degree, the lowliest devout man may feel the same; for there are none whose experiences of God as answering prayer may not be a light of hope to some souls sitting in the dark.

In vv. 7–12 the prayer for deliverance is urged on the ground that the singer's sufferings are the result of his devotion. Psalm xliv. 13–22 may be compared, and Jer. xv. 15 is an even closer parallel. Fasting and sackcloth are mentioned again together in Psalm xxxv. 13; and Lam. iii. 14 and Job xxx. 9 resemble ver. 12 *b*. Surrounded by a godless generation, the psalmist's earnestness of faith and concern for God's

honour made him an object of dislike, a target for drunken ridicule. These broke the strong ties of kindred, and acted as separating forces more strongly than brotherhood did, as a uniting one. "Zeal for God's house" presupposes the existence of the Temple, and also either its neglect or its desecration. That sunken condition of the sanctuary distressed the psalmist more than personal calamity, and it was the departure of Israel from God that made him clothe himself in sackcloth and fast and weep. But so far had deterioration gone that his mourning and its cause supplied materials for tipsy mirth, and his name became a by-word and a butt for malicious gossip. The whole picture is that of the standing experience of the godly among the godless. The Perfect Example of devotion and communion had to pass through these waters where they ran deepest and chilliest, but all who have His Spirit have their share of the same fate.

The last division of this first part (vv. 13–18) begins by setting in strong contrast the psalmist's prayer and the drunkard's song. He is sure that his cry will be heard, and so he calls the present time "a time of favour," and appeals, as often in the Psalter, to the multitude of God's loving-kindnesses and the faithfulness of His promise of salvation. Such a pleading with God on the ground of His manifested character is heard in vv. 13, 16, thus inclosing, as it were, the prayer for deliverance in a wrapping of reminders to God of His own name. The petitions here echo the description of peril in the former part—mire and watery depths—and add another kindred image in that of the "pit shutting her mouth" over the suppliant. He is plunged in a deep dungeon, well-shaped; and if a stone is rolled on to its opening, his last gleam

of daylight will be gone, and he will be buried alive. Beautifully do the pleas from God's character and those from the petitioner's sore need alternate, the latter predominating in vv. 17, 18. His thoughts pass from his own desperate condition to God's mercy, and from God's mercy to his own condition, and he has the reward of faith, in that he finds in his straits reasons for his assurance that this is a time of favour, as well as pleas to urge with God. They make the black backing which turns his soul into a mirror, reflecting God's promises in its trust.

The second part of the psalm (ver. 19 to end) has, like the former, three main divisions. The first of these, like vv. 1–6, is mainly a renewed spreading before God of the psalmist's trouble (vv. 19–21). Rooted sorrows are not plucked up by one effort. This recrudescence of fear breaking in upon the newly won serenity of faith is true to nature. On some parts of our coasts, where a narrow outlet hinders the free run of the tide, a second high water follows the first after an hour or so; and often a similar bar to the flowing away of fears brings them back in full rush after they had begun tc sink. The psalmist had appealed to God's knowledge of His "foolishness" as indorsing his protestations of innocence towards men. He now (ver. 19) appeals to His knowledge of his distresses, as indorsing his pitiful plaints. His soul is too deeply moved now to use metaphors. He speaks no more of mire and flood, but we hear the moan of a broken heart, and that wail which sounds sad across the centuries and wakes echoes in many solitary hearts. The psalmist's eyes had failed, while he looked upwards for a God whose coming seemed slow; but they had looked yet more wearily and vainly for human pity and comforters, and found

none. Instead of pity He had received only aggravation of misery. Such seems to be the force of giving gall for food, and vinegar to His thirst. The precise meaning of the word rendered "gall" is uncertain, but the general idea of something bitter is sufficient. That was all that His foes would give Him when hungry; and vinegar, which would make Him more thirsty still, was all that they proffered for His thirst. Such was their sympathy and comforting. According to Matthew, the potion of "wine (or vinegar) mingled with gall" was offered to and rejected by Jesus, before being fastened to the cross. He does not expressly quote the psalm, but probably refers to it. John, on the other hand, does tell us that Jesus, "that the scripture might be accomplished, said, I thirst," and sees its fulfilment in the kindly act of moistening the parched lips. The evangelist's expression does not necessarily imply that a desire to fulfil the scripture was our Lord's motive. Crucifixion was accompanied with torturing thirst, which wrung that last complaint from Jesus. But the evangelist discerns a Divine purpose behind the utterance of Jesus' human weakness; and it is surely less difficult, for any one who believes in supernatural revelation at all, to believe that the words of the psalmist were shaped by a higher power, and the hands of the Roman soldiers moved by another impulse than their own, than to believe that this minute correspondence of psalm and gospel is merely accidental.

But the immediately succeeding section warns us against pushing the Messianic character of the psalm too far, for these fearful imprecations cannot have any analogies in Christ's words (vv. 22–28). The form of the wish in "Let their table become a snare" is explained by remembering that the Eastern table was often a

leather flap laid on the ground, which the psalmist desires may start up as a snare, and close upon the feasters as they sit round it secure. Disease, continual terror, dimmed eyes, paralysed or quaking loins, ruin falling on their homes, and desolation round their encampment, so that they have no descendants, are the least of the evils invoked. The psalmist's desires go further than all this corporeal and material disaster. He prays that iniquity may be added to their iniquity—*i.e.*, that they may be held guilty of sin after sin; and that they may have no portion in God's righteousness—*i.e.*, in the gifts which flow from His adherence to His covenant.

The climax of all these maledictions is that awful wish that the persecutors may be blotted out of the book of life or of the living. True, the high New Testament conception of that book, according to which it is the burgess-roll of the citizens of the New Jerusalem, the possessors of eternal life, does not plainly belong to it in Old Testament usage, in which it means apparently the register of those living on earth. But to blot names therefrom is not only to kill, but to exclude from the national community, and so from all the privileges of the people of God. The psalmist desires for his foes the accumulation of all the ills that flesh is heir to, the extirpation of their families, and their absolute exclusion from the company of the living and the righteous. It is impossible to bring such utterances into harmony with the teachings of Jesus, and the attempt to vindicate them ignores plain facts and does violence to plain words. Better far to let them stand as a monument of the earlier stage of God's progressive revelation, and discern clearly the advance which Christian ethics has made on them.

The psalm ends with glad anticipations of deliverance and vows of thanksgiving. The psalmist is sure that God's salvation will lift him high above his enemies, and as sure that then he will be as grateful as he is now earnest in prayer, and surest of all that his thankful voice will sound sweeter in God's ear than any sacrifice would smell in His nostrils. There is no contempt of sacrifices expressed in "horned and hoofed," but simply the idea of maturity which fits the animal to be offered.

The single voice of praise will be caught up, the singer thinks, by a great chorus of those who would have been struck dumb with confusion if his prayer had not been answered (ver. 6), and who, in like manner, are gladdened by seeing his deliverance. The grace bestowed on one brings thanksgivings from many, which redound to the glory of God. The sudden transition in ver. 32 *b* to direct address to the seekers after God, as if they stood beside the solitary singer, gives vividness to the anticipation. The insertion of "behold" is warranted, and tells what revives the beholders' hearts. The seekers after God feel the pulse of a quicker life throbbing, when they see the wonders wrought through prayer. The singer's thoughts go beyond his own deliverance to that of Israel. "His captives" is most naturally understood as referring to the exiled nation. And this wider manifestation of God's restoring power will evoke praise from a wider circle, even from heaven, earth, and sea. The circumstances contemplated in vv. 33–36 are evidently those of a captivity. God's people are in bondage, the cities of Judah are in ruins, the inhabitants scattered far from their homes. The only reason for taking the closing verses as being a liturgical

addition is unwillingness to admit exilic or post-exilic psalms. But these verses cannot be fairly interpreted without recognising that they presuppose that Israel is in bondage, or at least on the verge of it. The circumstances of Jeremiah's life and times coincide closely with those of the psalmist.

PSALM LXX.*

1 *O God,* [be pleased] to deliver me,
Jehovah, hasten to my help.
2 Shamed and put to the blush be the seekers after my soul!
Turned back and dishonoured be they who delight in my calamity!
3 *Let them turn back* by reason of their shame who say, Oho! Oho!
4 Joyful and glad in Thee be all who seek Thee!
And "*God* be magnified" may they ever say who love Thy salvation!
5 But as for me, I am afflicted and needy;
O God, hasten to me:
My help and my deliverer art Thou;
Jehovah, delay not.

THIS psalm is all but identical with the last verses of Psalm xl. 13–17. Some unimportant alterations have been made, principally in the Divine names; but the principle on which they have been made is not obvious. It is scarcely correct to say, with Delitzsch, that the psalm "has been transformed, so as to become Elohistic"; for though it twice replaces the name of Jehovah with that of God (vv. 1, 4), it makes the converse change in ver. 5, last clause, by reading Jehovah instead of "God," as in Psalm xl.

Other changes are of little moment. The principal are in vv. 3 and 5. In the former the vehement wish that the psalmist's mockers may be *paralysed with shame*

* Italics show variations from Psalm xl.

is softened down into a desire that they may be *turned back*. The two verbs are similar in sound, and the substitution may have been accidental, a slip of memory or a defect in hearing, or it may have been an artistic variation of the original. In ver. 5 a prayer that God will hasten to the psalmist's help takes the place of an expression of confidence that "Jehovah purposes [good]" to him, and again there is similarity of sound in the two words. This change is like the subtle alteration which a painter might make on his picture by taking out one spot of high light. The gleam of confidence is changed to a call of need, and the tone of the whole psalm is thereby made more plaintive.

Hupfeld holds that this psalm is the original, and Psalm xl. a composite; but most commentators agree in regarding this as a fragment of that psalm. The cut has not been very cleanly made; for the necessary verb "be pleased" has been left behind, and the symmetry of ver. 1 is destroyed for want of it. The awkward incompleteness of this beginning witnesses that the psalm is a fragment.

PSALM LXXI.

1 In Thee, Jehovah, do I take refuge,
Let me not be put to shame for ever.
2 In Thy righteousness deliver me and rescue me,
Bend Thine ear and save me.
3 Be to me for a rock of habitation to go to continually:
Thou hast commanded to save me,
For my rock and my fortress art Thou.

4 My God, rescue me from the hand of the wicked,
From the fist of the evil-doer and the violent man.
5 For Thou [art] my hope,
O Lord Jehovah, [Thou art] my trust from my youth.
6 On Thee have I been stayed from the womb,
From my mother's bowels Thou hast been my protector:
Of Thee is my praise continually.

7 As a wonder am I become to many,
But Thou art my refuge—a strong one.
8 My mouth is filled with Thy praise,
All the day with Thine honour.
9 Cast me not away in the time of old age,
When my strength fails, forsake me not.

10 For mine enemies speak concerning me,
And the watchers of my soul consult together,
11 Saying, God has left him,
Chase and seize him; for there is no deliverer.
12 O God, be not far from me,
My God, haste to my help.

13 Ashamed, confounded, be the adversaries of my soul,
Covered with reproach and confusion be those who seek my hurt.

14 But as for me, continually will I hope,
And add to all Thy praise.
15 My mouth shall recount Thy righteousness,
All the day Thy salvation,
For I know not the numbers [thereof].

16 I will come with the mighty deeds of the Lord Jehovah,
I will celebrate Thy righteousness, [even] Thine only.
17 O God, Thou hast taught me from my youth,
And up till now I declare Thy wonders.
18 And even to old age and grey hairs,
O God, forsake me not,
Till I declare Thine arm to [the next] generation,
To all who shall come Thy power.
19 And Thy righteousness, O God, [reaches] to the height,
O Thou who hast done great things,
Who is like Thee?
20 Thou who hast made us see straits many and sore,
Thou wilt revive us again,
And from the abysses of the earth will bring us up again.
21 Thou wilt increase my greatness,
And wilt turn to comfort me.

22 Also I will thank Thee with the lyre, [even] Thy troth, my God,
I will harp unto Thee with the harp, Thou Holy One of Israel.
23 My lips shall sing aloud when I harp unto Thee,
And my soul, which Thou hast redeemed.
24 Also my tongue shall all the day muse on Thy righteousness,
For shamed, for put to the blush, are they that seek my hurt.

ECHOES of former psalms make the staple of this one, and even those parts of it which are not quotations have little individuality. The themes are familiar, and the expression of them is scarcely less so. There is no well-defined strophical structure, and little continuity of thought or feeling. Vv. 13 and 24 *b* serve as a kind of partial refrain, and may be taken as dividing the psalm into two parts, but there is little difference between the contents of the two. Delitzsch gives in his adhesion to the hypothesis that Jeremiah was the author; and there is considerable weight in the reasons assigned for that ascription of authorship. The pensive, plaintive tone; the abundant quotations, with slight alterations of the passages cited; the autobiographical hints which fit in with Jeremiah's history,

are the chief of these. But they can scarcely be called conclusive. There is more to be said for the supposition that the singer is the personified nation in this case than in many others. The sudden transition to "us" in ver. 20, which the Massoretic marginal correction corrects into "me," favours, though it does not absolutely require, that view, which is also supported by the frequent allusion to "youth" and "old age." These, however, are capable of a worthy meaning, if referring to an individual. Vv. 1–3 are slightly varied from Psalm xxxi. 1–3. The character of the changes will be best appreciated by setting the two passages side by side.

Psalm xxxi.	Psalm lxxi.
1 In Thee, Jehovah, do I take refuge; let me not be ashamed for ever:	1 In Thee, Jehovah, do I take refuge:
In Thy righteousness rescue me.	Let me not be put to shame for ever.
2*a* Bend Thine ear to me; deliver me speedily.	2 In Thy righteousness deliver me and rescue me:
	Bend Thine ear and save me.

The two verbs, which in the former psalm are in separate clauses ("deliver" and "rescue"), are here brought together. "Speedily" is omitted, and "save" is substituted for "deliver," which has been drawn into the preceding clause. Obviously no difference of meaning is intended to be conveyed, and the changes look very like the inaccuracies of memoriter quotations. The next variation is as follows:—

Psalm xxxi.	Psalm lxxi.
2*b* Be to me for a strong rock, for a house of defence to save me.	3 Be to me for a rock of habitation to go to continually:
3 For my rock and my fortress art Thou,	Thou hast commanded to save me;
	For my rock and my fortress art Thou.

The difference between "a strong rock" and "rock of habitation" is but one letter. That between "for a house of defence" and "to go to continually: Thou hast commanded" is extremely slight, as Baethgen has well shown. Possibly both of these variations are due to textual corruption, but more probably this psalmist intentionally altered the words of an older psalm. Most of the old versions have the existing text, but the LXX. seems to have read the Hebrew here as in Psalm xxxi. The changes are not important, but they are significant. That thought of God as a habitation to which the soul may continually find access goes very deep into the secrets of the devout life. The variation in ver. 3 is recommended by observing the frequent recurrence of "continually" in this psalm, of which that word may almost be said to be the motto. Nor is the thought of God's command given to His multitude of unnamed servants, to save this poor man, one which we can afford to lose.

Vv. 5, 6, are a similar variation of Psalm xxii. 9, 10. "On Thee have I been stayed from the womb," says this psalmist; "On Thee was I cast from the womb," says the original passage. The variation beautifully brings out, not only reliance on God, but the Divine response to that reliance by life-long upholding. That strong arm answers leaning weakness with firm support, and whosoever relies on it is upheld by it. The word rendered above "protector" is doubtful. It is substituted for that in Psalm xxii. 9 which means "One that takes out," and some commentators would attach the same meaning to the word used here, referring it to God's goodness before and at birth. But it is better taken as equivalent to benefactor, provider, or some such designation, and as referring to God's lifelong care.

The psalmist has been "a wonder" to many spectators, either in the sense that they have gazed astonished at God's goodness, or, as accords better with the adversative character of the next clause ("But Thou art my refuge"), that his sufferings have been unexampled. Both ideas may well be combined, for the life of every man, if rightly studied, is full of miracles both of mercy and judgment. If the psalm is the voice of an individual, the natural conclusion from such words is that his life was conspicuous; but it is obvious that the national reference is appropriate here.

On this thankful retrospect of life-long help and life-long trust the psalm builds a prayer for future protection from eager enemies, who think that the charmed life is vulnerable at last.

Vv. 9–13 rise to a height of emotion above the level of the rest of the psalm. On one hypothesis, we have in them the cry of an old man, whose strength diminishes as his dangers increase. Something undisclosed in his circumstances gave colour to the greedy hopes of his enemies. Often prosperous careers are overclouded at the end, and the piteous spectacle is seen of age overtaken by tempests which its feebleness cannot resist, and which are all the worse to face because of the calms preceding them. On the national hypothesis, the psalm is the prayer of Israel at a late stage of its history, from which it looks back to the miracles of old, and then to the ring of enemies rejoicing over its apparent weakness, and then upwards to the Eternal Helper.

Vv. 12, 13, are woven out of other psalms. 12 *a*, "Be not far from me," is found in xxii. 11, 19; xxxv. 22; xxxviii. 21, etc. "Haste to my help" is found in xxxviii. 22; xl. 13 (lxx. 1). For ver. 13 compare

xxxv. 4, 26; xl. 14 (lxx. 2). With this, as a sort of refrain, the first part of the psalm ends.

The second part goes over substantially the same ground, but with lighter heart. The confidence of deliverance is more vivid, and it, as well as the vow of praise following thereon, bulk larger. The singer has thinned away his anxieties by speaking them to God, and has by the same process solidified his faith. Aged eyes should see God, the helper, more clearly when earth begins to look grey and dim. The forward look of such finds little to stay it on this side of heaven. As there seems less and less to hope for here, there should be more and more there. Youth is the time for buoyant anticipation, according to the world's notions, but age may have far brighter lights ahead than youth had leisure to see. "I will hope always" becomes sublime from aged lips, which are so often shaped to say, "I have nothing left to hope for now."

This psalmist's words may well be a pattern for old men, who need fear no failure of buoyancy, nor any collapse of gladness, if they will fix their thoughts where this singer did his. Other subjects of thought and speech will pall and run dry; but he whose theme is God's righteousness and the salvation that flows from it will never lack materials for animating meditation and grateful praise. "I know not the numbers thereof." It is something to have fast hold of an inexhaustible subject. It will keep an old man young.

The psalmist recognises his task, which is also his joy, to declare God's wondrous works, and prays for God's help till he has discharged it. The consciousness of a vocation to speak to later generations inspires him, and assures him that he is immortal till his work is done. His anticipations have been fulfilled

beyond his knowledge. His words will last as long as the world. But men with narrower spheres may be animated by the same consciousness, and they who have rightly understood the purpose of God's mercies to themselves will, like the psalmist, recognise in their own participation in His salvation an imperative command to make it known, and an assurance that nothing shall by any means harm them till they have fulfilled their witnessing. A many-wintered saint should be a convincing witness for God.

Ver. 20, with its sudden transition to the plural, may simply show that the singer passes out from individual contemplation to the consciousness of the multitude of fellow-sufferers and fellow-participants in God's mercy. Such transition is natural; for the most private passages of a good man's communion with God are swift to bring up the thought of others like-minded and similarly blessed. "Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising." Every solo swells into a chorus. Again the song returns to "my" and "me," the confidence of the single soul being reinvigorated by the thought of sharers in blessing.

So all ends with the certainty of, and the vow of praise for, deliverances already realised in faith, though not in fact. But the imitative character of the psalm is maintained even in this last triumphant vow; for ver. 24 *a* is almost identical with xxxv. 28; and *b*, as has been already pointed out, is copied from several other psalms. But imitative words are none the less sincere; and new thankfulness may be run into old moulds, without detriment to its acceptableness to God and preciousness to men.

PSALM LXXII.

1 O God, give Thy judgments to the king,
And Thy righteousness to the king's son.
2 May he judge Thy people with righteousness,
And Thine afflicted with judgment!
3 May the mountains bring forth peace to the people,
And the hills, through righteousness!
4 May he judge the afflicted of the people,
Save the children of the needy,
And crush the oppressor!

5 May they fear Thee as long as the sun shines,
And as long as the moon shows her face, generation after generation!
6 May he come down like rain upon mown pasture,
Like showers—a heavy downpour on the earth!
7 May the righteous flourish in his days,
And abundance of peace, till there be no more a moon!

8 May he have dominion from sea to sea,
And from the River to the ends of the earth!
9 Before him shall the desert peoples bow;
And his enemies shall lick the dust.
10 The kings of Tarshish and the isles shall bring tribute:
The kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts.
11 And all kings shall fall down before him:
All nations shall serve him.

12 For he shall deliver the needy when he cries,
And the afflicted, and him who has no helper.
13 He shall spare the weak and needy,
And the souls of the needy shall he save.
14 From oppression and from violence he shall ransom their soul;
And precious shall their blood be in his eyes.

15 So that he lives and gives to him of the gold of Sheba,
And prays for him continually,
Blesses him all the day.

16 May there be abundance of corn in the earth on the top of the mountains!
May its fruit rustle like Lebanon!
And may [men] spring from the city like grass of the earth!
17 May his name last for ever!
May his name send forth shoots as long as the sun shines,
And may men bless themselves in him,
May all nations pronounce him blessed!

18 Blessed be Jehovah, God, the God of Israel,
Who only doeth wondrous works,
19 And blessed be His glorious name for ever,
And let the whole earth be filled with His glory!
Amen, and Amen.

20 The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.

RIGHTLY or wrongly, the superscription ascribes this psalm to Solomon. Its contents have led several commentators to take the superscription in a meaning for which there is no warrant, as designating the subject, not the author. Clearly, the whole is a prayer for the king; but why should not he be both suppliant and object of supplication? Modern critics reject this as incompatible with the "phraseological evidence," and adduce the difference between the historical Solomon and the ideal of the psalm as negativing reference to him. Ver. 8 is said by them to be quoted from Zech. ix. 10, though Cheyne doubts whether there is borrowing. Ver. 17 *b* is said to be dependent on Gen. xxii. 18, xxvi. 4, which are assumed to be later than the seventh century. Ver. 12 is taken to be a reminiscence of Job xxix. 12, and ver. 16 *b* of Job v. 25. But these are too uncertain criteria to use as conclusive,—partly because coincidence does not

necessarily imply quotation; partly because, quotation being admitted, the delicate question of priority remains, which can rarely be settled by comparison of the passages in question; and partly because, quotation and priority being admitted, the date of the original is still under discussion. The impossibility of Solomon's praying thus for himself does not seem to the present writer so completely established that the hypothesis must be abandoned, especially if the alternative is to be, as Hitzig, followed by Olshausen and Cheyne, proposes, that the king in the psalm is Ptolemy Philadelphus, to whom Psalm xlv. is fitted by the same authorities. Baethgen puts the objections which most will feel to such a theory with studied moderation when he says "that the promises given to the patriarchs in Gen. xxii. 18, xxvi. 4, should be transferred by a pious Israelite to a foreign king appears to me improbable." But another course is open—namely, to admit that the psalm gives no materials for defining its date, beyond the fact that a king of Davidic descent was reigning when it was composed. The authorship may be left uncertain, as may the name of the king for whom such far-reaching blessings were invoked; for he was but a partial embodiment of the kingly idea, and the very disproportion between the reality seen in any Jewish monarch and the lofty idealisms of the psalm compels us to regard the earthly ruler as but a shadow, and the true theme of the singer as being the Messianic King. We are not justified, however, in attempting to transfer every point of the psalmist's prayer to the Messiah. The historical occasion of the psalm is to be kept in mind. A human monarch stands in the foreground; but the aspirations expressed are so far beyond anything that he is or can be, that they are either extravagant

flattery, or reach out beyond their immediate occasion to the King Messiah.

The psalm is not properly a prediction, but a prayer. There is some divergence of opinion as to the proper rendering of the principal verbs,—some, as the A.V. and R.V. (text), taking them as uniformly futures, which is manifestly wrong; some taking them as expressions of wish throughout, which is also questionable; and others recognising pure futures intermingled with petitions, which seems best. The boundaries of the two are difficult to settle, just because the petitions are so confident that they are all but predictions, and the two melt into each other in the singer's mind. The flow of thought is simple. The psalmist's prayers are broadly massed. In vv. 1–4 he prays for the foundation of the king's reign in righteousness, which will bring peace; in vv. 5–7 for its perpetuity, and in vv. 8–11 for its universality; while in vv. 12–15 the ground of both these characteristics is laid in the king's becoming the champion of the oppressed. A final prayer for the increase of his people and the perpetuity and world-wide glory of his name concludes the psalm, to which are appended in vv. 18–20 a doxology, closing the Second Book of the Psalter.

The first petitions of the psalm all ask for one thing for the king—namely, that he should give righteous judgment. They reflect the antique conception of a king as the fountain of justice, himself making and administering law and giving decisions. Thrice in these four verses does "righteousness" occur as the foundation attribute of an ideal king. Caprice, self-interest, and tyrannous injustice were rank in the world's monarchies round the psalmist. Bitter experi-

ence and sad observation had taught him that the first condition of national prosperity was a righteous ruler. These petitions are also animated by the conception, which is as true in the modern as in the ancient world, that righteousness has its seat in the bosom of God, and that earthly judgments are righteous when they conform to and are the echo of His. "Righteousness" is the quality of mind, of which the several "judgments" are the expressions. This king sits on an ancestral throne. His people are God's people. Since, then, he is God's viceroy, the desire cannot be vain that in his heart there may be some reflection of God's righteousness, and that his decisions may accord with God's. One cannot but remember Solomon's prayer for "an understanding heart," that he might judge this people; nor forget how darkly his later reign showed against its bright beginning. A righteous king makes a peaceful people, especially in a despotic monarchy. The sure results of such a reign—which are, likewise, the psalmist's chief reason for his petitions—are set forth in the vivid metaphor of ver. 3, in which peace is regarded as the fruit which springs, by reason of the king's righteousness, from mountains and hills. This psalmist has special fondness for that figure of vegetable growth (vv. 7, 16, 17); and it is especially suitable in this connection, as peace is frequently represented in Scripture as the fruit of righteousness, both in single souls and in a nation's history. The mountains come into view here simply as being the most prominent features of the land, and not, as in ver. 16, with any reference to their barrenness, which would make abundant growth on them more wonderful, and indicative of yet greater abundance on the plains.

A special manifestation of judicial righteousness is

the vindication of the oppressed and the punishment of the oppressor (ver. 4). The word rendered "judge" in ver. 4 differs from that in ver. 2, and is the same from which the name of the "Judges" in Israel is derived. Like them, this king is not only to pronounce decisions, as the word in ver. 2 means, but is to execute justice by acts of deliverance, which smite in order to rescue. Functions which policy and dignity require to be kept apart in the case of earthly rulers are united in the ideal monarch. He executes his own sentences. His acts are decisions. The psalmist has no thought of inferior officers by the king's side. One figure fills his mind and his canvas. Surely such an ideal is either destined to remain for ever a fair dream, or its fulfilment is to be recognised in the historical Person in whom God's righteousness dwelt in higher fashion than psalmists knew, who was, "first, King of righteousness, and then, after that, also King of peace," and who, by His deed, has broken every yoke, and appeared as the defender of all the needy. The poet prayed that Israel's king might perfectly discharge his office by Divine help; the Christian gives thanks that the King of men has been and done all which Israel's monarchs failed to be and do.

The perpetuity of the king's reign and of his subjects' peace is the psalmist's second aspiration (vv. 5–7). The "Thee" of ver. 5 presents a difficulty, as it is doubtful to whom it refers. Throughout the psalm the king is spoken *of*, and never *to*; and if it is further noticed that, in the preceding verses, God has been directly addressed, and "Thy" used thrice in regard to Him, it will appear more natural to take the reference in ver. 5 to be to Him. The fear of God would be diffused among the king's subjects, as a consequence

of his rule in righteousness. Hupfeld takes the word as referring to the king, and suggests changing the text to "him" instead of "Thee"; while others, among whom are Cheyne and Baethgen, follow the track of the LXX. in adopting a reading which may be translated "May he live," or "Prolong his days." But the thought yielded by the existing text, if referred to God, is most natural and worthy. The king is, as it were, the shadow on earth of God's righteousness, and consequently becomes an organ for the manifestation thereof, in such manner as to draw men to true devotion. The psalmist's desires are for something higher than external prosperity, and his conceptions of the kingly office are very sacred. Not only peace and material well-being, but also the fear of Jehovah, are longed for by him to be diffused in Israel. And he prays that these blessings may be perpetual. The connection between the king's righteousness and the fear of God requires that that permanence should belong to both. The cause is as lasting as its effect. Through generation after generation he desires that each shall abide. He uses peculiar expressions for continual duration: "with the sun"—*i.e.*, contemporaneous with that unfading splendour; "before the face of the moon"—*i.e.*, as long as she shines. But could the singer anticipate such length of dominion for any human king? Psalm xxi. has similar language in regard to the same person; and here, as there, it seems sufficiently accounted for by the consideration that, while the psalmist was speaking of an individual, he was thinking of the office rather than of the person, and that the perpetual continuance of the Davidic dynasty, not the undying life of any one representative of it, was meant. The full light of the

truth that there is a king whose royalty, like his priesthood, passes to no other is not to be forced upon the psalm. It stands as a witness that devout and inspired souls longed for the establishment of a kingdom, against which revolutions and enemies and mortality were powerless. They knew not that their desires could not be fulfilled by the longest succession of dying kings, but were to be more than accomplished by One, "of whom it is witnessed that He liveth."

The psalmist turns for a moment from his prayer for the perpetuity of the king's rule, to linger upon the thought of its blessedness as set forth in the lovely image of ver. 6. Rain upon mown grass is no blessing, as every farmer knows; but what is meant is, not the grass which has already been mown, but the naked meadow from which it has been taken. It needs drenching showers, in order to sprout again and produce an aftermath. The poet's eye is caught by the contrast between the bare look of the field immediately after cutting and the rich growth that springs, as by magic, from the yellow roots after a plentiful shower. This king's gracious influences shall fall upon even what seems dead, and charm forth hidden life that will flush the plain with greenness. The psalmist dwells on the picture, reiterating the comparison in ver. 6 *b*, and using there an uncommon word, which seems best rendered as meaning a heavy rainfall. With such affluence of quickening powers will the righteous king bless his people. The "Mirror for Magistrates," which is held up in the lovely poem in 2 Sam. xxiii. 4, has a remarkable parallel in its description of the just ruler as resembling a "morning without clouds, when the tender grass springeth out of the earth through clear shining after rain"; but the

psalmist heightens the metaphor by the introduction of the mown meadow as stimulated to new growth. This image of the rain lingers with him and shapes his prayer in ver. *7 a*. A righteous king will insure prosperity to the righteous, and the number of such will increase. Both these ideas seem to be contained in the figure of their flourishing, which is literally *bud* or *shoot*. And, as the people become more and more prevailingly righteous, they receive more abundant and unbroken peace. The psalmist had seen deeply into the conditions of national prosperity, as well as those of individual tranquillity, when he based these on rectitude.

With ver. 8 the singer takes a still loftier flight, and prays for the universality of the king's dominion. In that verse the form of the verb is that which expresses desire, but in ver. 9 and following verses the verbs may be rendered as simple futures. Confident prayers insensibly melt into assurances of their own fulfilment. As the psalmist pours out his petitions, they glide into prophecies; for they are desires fashioned upon promises, and bear, in their very earnestness, the pledge of their realisation. As to the details of the form which the expectation of universal dominion here takes, it need only be noted that we have to do with a poet, not with a geographer. We are not to treat the expressions as if they were instructions to a boundary commission, and to be laid down upon a map. "The sea" is probably the Mediterranean; but what the other sea which makes the opposite boundary may be is hard to say. Commentators have thought of the Persian Gulf, or of an imaginary ocean encircling the flat earth, according to ancient ideas But more probably the expression is as indeterminate as the parallel one, "the ends of the earth." In the first clause of the verse the psalmist

starts from the Mediterranean, the western boundary, and his anticipations travel away into the unknown eastern regions; while, in the second clause, he begins with the Euphrates, which was the eastern boundary of the dominion promised to Israel, and, coming westward, he passes out in thought to the dim regions beyond. The very impossibility of defining the boundaries declares the boundlessness of the kingdom. The poet's eyes have looked east and west, and in ver. 9 he turns to the south, and sees the desert tribes, unconquered as they have hitherto been, grovelling before the king, and his enemies in abject submission at his feet. The word rendered "desert peoples" is that used in Psalm lxxiv. 14 for wild beasts inhabiting the desert, but here it can only mean *wilderness tribes*. There seems no need to alter the text, as has been proposed, and to read "adversaries." In ver. 10 the psalmist again looks westward, across the mysterious ocean of which he, like all his nation, knew so little. The great city of Tarshish lay for him at the farthest bounds of the world; and between him and it, or perhaps still farther out in the waste unknown, were islands from which rich and strange things sometimes reached Judæa. These shall bring their wealth in token of fealty. Again he looks southward to Sheba in Arabia, and Seba far south below Egypt, and foresees their submission. His knowledge of distant lands is exhausted, and therefore he ceases enumeration, and falls back on comprehensiveness. How little he knew, and how much he believed! His conceptions of the sweep of that "all" were childish; his faith that, however many these unknown kings and nations were, God's anointed was their king was either extravagant exaggeration, or it was nurtured in him by God, and meant to be

fulfilled when a world, wide beyond his dreams and needy beyond his imagination, should own the sway of a King, endowed with God's righteousness and communicative of God's peace, in a manner and measure beyond his desires.

The triumphant swell of these anticipations passes with wonderful pathos into gentler music, as if the softer tones of flutes should follow trumpet blasts. How tenderly and profoundly the psalm bases the universality of the dominion on the pitying care and delivering power of the King! The whole secret of sway over men lies in that "For," which ushers in the gracious picture of the beneficent and tender-hearted Monarch. The world is so full of sorrow, and men are so miserable and needy, that he who can stanch their wounds, solace their griefs, and shelter their lives will win their hearts and be crowned their king. Thrones based on force are as if set on an iceberg which melts away. There is no solid foundation for rule except helpfulness. In the world and for a little while "they that exercise authority are called benefactors"; but in the long-run the terms of the sentence are inverted, and they that are rightly called benefactors exercise authority. The more earthly rulers approximate to this ideal portrait, the more "broad-based upon their people's will" and love will their thrones stand. If Israel's kings had adhered to it, their throne would have endured. But their failures point to Him in whom the principle declared by the psalmist receives its most tender illustration. The universal dominion of Jesus Christ is based upon the fact that He "tasted death for every man." In the Divine purpose, He has won the right to rule men because He has died for them. In historical realisation, He wins men's submission

because He has given Himself for them. Therefore does He command with absolute authority; therefore do we obey with entire submission. His sway not only reaches out over all the earth, inasmuch as the power of His cross extends to all men, but it lays hold of the inmost will and makes submission a delight.

The king is represented in ver. 14 as taking on himself the office of Goel, or Kinsman-Redeemer, and ransoming his subjects' lives from "deceit and violence." That "their blood is precious in his eyes" is another way of saying that they are too dear to him to be suffered to perish. This king's treasure is the life of his subjects. Therefore he will put forth his power to preserve them and deliver them. The result of such tender care and delivering love is set forth in ver. 15, but in obscure language. The ambiguity arises from the absence of expressed subjects for the four verbs in the verse. Who is he who "lives"? Is the same person the giver of the gold of Sheba, and to whom is it given? Who prays, and for whom? And who blesses, and whom does he bless? The plain way of understanding the verse is to suppose that the person spoken of in all the clauses is the same; and then the question comes whether he is the king or the ransomed man. Difficulties arise in carrying out either reference through all the clauses; and hence attempts have been made to vary the subject of the verbs. Delitzsch, for instance, supposes that it is the ransomed man who "lives," the king who gives to the ransomed man gold, and the man who prays for and blesses the king. But such an arbitrary shuttling about of the reference of "he" and "him" is impossible. Other attempts of a similar kind need not be noticed here. The only satisfactory course is to take one person as

spoken of by all the verbs. But then the question comes, Who is he? There is much to be said in favour of either hypothesis as answering that question. The phrase which is rendered above "So that he lives" is so like the common invocation "May the king live," that it strongly favours taking the whole verse as a continuance of the petitions for the monarch. But if so, the verb in the second clause (*he shall give*) must be taken impersonally, as equivalent to "one will give" or "there shall be given," and those in the remaining clauses must be similarly dealt with, or the text altered so as to make them plurals, reading, "They shall pray for him (the king), . . . and shall bless him." On the whole, it is best to suppose that the ransomed man is the subject throughout, and that the verse describes his glad tribute, and continual thankfulness. Ransomed from death, he brings offerings to his deliverer. It seems singular that he should be conceived of both as "needy" and as owning "gold" which he can offer; but in the literal application the incongruity is not sufficient to prevent the adoption of this view of the clause; and in the higher application of the words to Christ and His subjects, which we conceive to be warranted, the incongruity becomes fine and deep truth; for the poorest soul, delivered by Him, can bring tribute, which He esteems as precious beyond all earthly treasure. Nor need the remaining clauses militate against the view that the ransomed man is the subject in them. The psalm had a historical basis, and all its points cannot be introduced into the Messianic interpretation. This one of praying for the king cannot be; notwithstanding the attempts of some commentators to find a meaning for it in Christian prayers for the spread of Christ's kingdom. That explanation

does violence to the language, mistakes the nature of Messianic prophecy, and brings discredit on the view that the psalm has a Messianic character.

The last part of the psalm (vv. 16, 17) recurs to petitions for the growth of the nation and the perpetual flourishing of the king's name. The fertility of the land and the increase of its people are the psalmist's desires, which are also certainties, as expressed in ver. 16. He sees in imagination the whole land waving with abundant harvests, which reach even to the tops of the mountains, and rustle in the summer air, with a sound like the cedars of Lebanon, when they move their layers of greenness to the breeze. The word rendered above "abundance" is doubtful; but there does not seem to be in the psalmist's mind the contrast which he is often supposed to be expressing, beautiful and true as it, is between the small beginnings and the magnificent end of the kingdom on earth. The mountains are here thought of as lofty and barren. If waving harvests clothe their gaunt sides, how will the vales laugh in plentiful crops! As the earth yields her increase, so the people of the king shall be multiplied, and from all his cities they shall spring forth abundant as grass. That figure would bear much expansion; for what could more beautifully set forth rapidity of growth, close-knit community, multiplication of units, and absorption of these in a lovely whole, than the picture of a meadow clothed with its grassy carpet? Such hopes had only partial fulfilment in Israel. Nor have they had adequate fulfilment up till now. But they lie on the horizon of the future, and they shall one day be reached. Much that is dim is treasured in them. There may be a renovated world, from which the curse of barrenness has been banished.

There shall be a swift increase of the subjects of the King, until the earlier hope of the psalm is fulfilled, and all nations shall serve Him.

But bright as are the poet's visions concerning the kingdom, his last gaze is fastened on its king, and he prays that his name may last for ever, and may send forth shoots as long as the sun shines in the sky. He probably meant no more than a prayer for the continual duration of the dynasty, and his conception of the name as sending forth shoots was probably that of its being perpetuated in descendants. But, as has been already noticed, the perpetuity, which he conceived of as belonging to a family and an office, really belongs to the One King, Jesus Christ, whose Name is above every name, and will blossom anew in fresh revelations of its infinite contents, not only while the sun shines, but when its fires are cold and its light quenched. The psalmist's last desire is that the ancient promise to the fathers may be fulfilled in the King, their descendant, in whom men shall bless themselves. So full of blessedness may He seem to all men, that they shall take Him for the very type of felicity, and desire to be even as He is! In men's relation to Christ the phrase assumes a deeper meaning still; and though that is not intended by the psalmist, and is not the exposition of his words, it still is true that in Christ all blessings for humanity are stored, and that therefore if men are to be truly blessed they must plunge themselves into Him, and in Him find all that they need for blessedness and nobility of life and character. If He is our supreme type of whatsoever things are fair and of good report, and if we have bowed ourselves to Him because He has delivered us from death, then we share in His life, and all His blessings are parted among us.

BOOK III.

PSALMS LXXIII.—LXXXIX.

PSALM LXXIII.

1 Surely God is good to Israel,
To those who are pure in heart;
2 But I—within a little of turning aside were my feet,
All but slipping were my steps.

3 For I was envious of the foolish,
When I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
4 For they have no bonds [dragging them] to death,
And their body is lusty.
5 In the trouble belonging to frail mortals they have no part,
And [in common] with men they are not smitten.
6 Therefore pride is their necklace;
Violence covers them as a robe.

7 Out of fat their eye flashes;
The imaginations of their heart overflow.
8 They mock and speak wickedly of oppression,
[As] from on high they speak.
9 They set in the heavens their mouth,
And their tongue stalks on the earth.
10 Therefore he turns his people thither,
And waters of abundance are drunk up by them.

11 And they say, How does God know?
And is there knowledge in the Most High?
12 Behold! these are wicked,
And, prosperous for ever, they have increased their wealth.
13 Surely in vain have I cleansed my heart,
And in innocency have washed my hands.
14 Yet have I been smitten all the day,
And my correction [came] every morning.

15 If I had said, I will speak thus,
Behold, I should have been unfaithful to the generation of Thy children.

16 When I gave thought in order to understand this,
It was too difficult in my eyes—
17 Until I went into the sanctuary of God,
And gave heed to their end.
18 Surely in slippery places Thou dost set them;
Thou castest them down to ruins.

19 How are they become a desolation in a moment,
Are ended, consumed with terrors!
20 Like a dream on awaking,
So Lord, on [Thy] arousing, Thou wilt despise their shadowy form.
21 For my heart was growing bitter,
And I was pricked [in] my reins.
22 And I, I was brutish and ignorant,
A [very] beast was I before Thee.

23 And yet I, I am continually with Thee;
Thou hast grasped [me] by my right hand.
24 In Thy counsel Thou wilt guide me,
And afterwards to glory wilt "take" me.
25 Whom have I in heaven?
And, possessing Thee, I have no delight on earth.
26 [Though] my flesh and my heart fail,
The rock of my heart and my portion is God for ever.

27 For, behold, they that are far from Thee shall perish;
Thou hast destroyed every one that goes whoring from Thee.
28 But I, I—to draw near to God is good to me;
I have made in the Lord Jehovah my refuge,
That I may recount all Thy works.

THE perennial problem of reconciling God's moral government with observed facts is grappled with in this psalm, as in Psalms xxxvii. and xlix. It tells how the prosperity of the godless, in apparent flat contradiction of Divine promises, had all but swept the psalmist from his faith, and how he was led, through doubt and struggle, to closer communion with God, in which he learned, not only the evanescence of the external well-being which had so perplexed him, but

the eternity of the true blessedness belonging to the godly. His solution of the problem is in part that of the two psalms just mentioned, but it surpasses them in its clear recognition that the portion of the righteous, which makes their lot supremely blessed, is no mere earthly prosperity, but God Himself, and in its pointing to "glory" which comes afterwards, as one element in the solution of the problem.

The psalm falls into two divisions, in the first of which (vv. 1–14) the psalmist tells of his doubts, and, in the second (vv. 15–28), of his victory over them. The body of the psalm is divided into groups of four verses, and it has an introduction and conclusion of two verses each.

The introduction (vv. 1, 2) asserts, with an accent of assurance, the conviction which the psalmist had all but lost, and therefore had the more truly won. The initial word "Surely" is an indication of his past struggle, when the truth that God was good to Israel had seemed so questionable. "This I have learned by doubts; this I now hold as most sure; this I proclaim, impugn it who list, and seem to contradict it what may." The decisiveness of the psalmist's conviction does not lead him to exaggeration. He does not commit himself to the thesis that outward prosperity attends Israel. That God is good to those who truly bear that name is certain; but how He shows His goodness, and who these are, the psalmist has, by his struggles, learned to conceive of in a more spiritual fashion than before. That goodness may be plainly seen in sorrows, and it is only sealed to those who are what the name of Israel imports—"pure in heart." That such are blessed in possessing God, and that neither are any other blessed, nor is there any other

blessedness, are the lessons which the singer has brought with him from the darkness, and by which the ancient faith of the well-being of the righteous is set on surer foundations than before.

The avowal of conquered doubts follows on this clear note of certitude. There is a tinge of shame in the emphatic "I" of ver. 2, and in the broken construction and the change of subject to "my feet" and "my steps." The psalmist looks back to that dreary time, and sees more clearly than he did, while he was caught in the toils of perplexity and doubt, how narrow had been his escape from casting away his confidence. He shudders as he remembers it; but he can do so now from the vantage-ground of tried and regained faith. How eloquently the order of thought in these two verses speaks of the complete triumph over doubt!

In the first quatrain of verses, the prosperity of the godless, which had been the psalmist's stumbling-block, is described. Two things are specified—physical health, and exemption from calamity. The former is the theme of ver. 4. Its first clause is doubtful. The word rendered "bands" only occurs here and in Isa. lviii. 6. It literally means bands, but may pass into the figurative signification of pains, and is sometimes by some taken in that meaning here, and the whole clause as asserting that the wicked have painless and peaceful deaths. But such a declaration is impossible in the face of vv. 18, 19, which assert the very opposite, and would be out of place at this point of the psalm, which is here occupied with the lives, not the deaths, of the ungodly. Hupfeld translates "They are without pains even until their deaths"; but that rendering puts an unusual sense on the preposition "to," which is not "till." A very plausible conjecture

alters the division of words, splitting the one which means "to their death" (*l'motham*) into two (*lamo tam*), of which the former is attached to the preceding words ("there are no pains *to them*" = "they have no pains"), and the latter to the following clause ("*Sound* and well nourished is," etc.). This suggestion is adopted by Ewald and most modern commentators, and has much in its favour. If the existing text is retained, the rendering above seems best. It describes the prosperous worldling as free from troubles or diseases, which would be like chains on a captive, by which he is dragged to execution. It thus gives a parallel to the next clause, which describes their bodies (lit., belly) as stalwart. Ver. 5 carries on the description, and paints the wicked's exemption from trouble. The first clause is literally, "In the trouble of man they are not." The word for man here is that which connotes frailty and mortality, while in the next clause it is the generic term "Adam." Thus the prosperous worldlings appeared to the psalmist, in his times of scepticism, as possessing charmed lives, which were free from all the ills that came from frailty and mortality, and, as like superior beings, lifted above the universal lot. But what did their exemption do for them? Its effects might have taught the doubter that the prosperity at which his faith staggered was no blessing, for it only inflated its recipients with pride, and urged them on to high-handed acts. Very graphically does ver. 6 paint them as having the former for their necklace, and the latter for their robe. A proud man carries a stiff neck and a high head. Hence the picture in ver. 6 of "pride" as wreathed about their necks as a chain or necklace. High-handed violence is their garment, according to the familiar metaphor by

which a man's characteristics are likened to his dress, the garb of his soul. The double meaning of "habit," and the connection between "custom" and "costume," suggest the same figure. As the clothing wraps the body and is visible to the world, so insolent violence, masterfulness enforced by material weapons and contemptuous of others' rights, characterised these men, who had never learned gentleness in the school of suffering. Tricked out with a necklace of pride and a robe of violence, they strutted among men, and thought themselves far above the herd, and secure from the touch of trouble.

The next group of verses (vv. 7–10) further describes the unfeeling insolence begotten of unbroken prosperity, and the crowd of hangers-on, admirers, and imitators attendant on the successful wicked. "Out of fat their eye flashes" gives a graphic picture of the fierce glare of insolent eyes, set in well-fed faces. But graphic as it is, it scarcely fits the context so well as does a proposed amended reading, which by a very small change in the word rendered "their eye" yields the meaning "their iniquity," and takes "fat" as equivalent to a fat, that is, an obstinate, self-confident, or unfeeling heart. "From an unfeeling heart their iniquity comes forth" makes a perfect parallel with the second clause of the verse rightly rendered, "the imaginations of their heart overflow"; and both clauses paint the arrogant tempers and bearing of the worldlings. Ver. 8 deals with the manifestation of these in speech. Well-to-do wickedness delights in making suffering goodness a butt for its coarse jeers. It does not need much wit to do that. Clumsy jests are easy, and poverty is fair game for vulgar wealth's ridicule. But there is a dash of ferocity in such laughter, and such jests

pass quickly into earnest, and wicked oppression. "As from on high they speak,"—fancying themselves set on a pedestal above the common masses. The LXX., followed by many moderns, attaches "oppression" to the second clause, which makes the verse more symmetrical; but the existing division of clauses yields an appropriate sense.

The description of arrogant speech is carried on in ver. 9, which has been variously understood, as referring in *a* to blasphemy against God ("they set against the heavens their mouth"), and in *b* to slander against men; or, as in *a*, continuing the thought of ver. 8 *b*, and designating their words as spoken as if from heaven itself, and in *b* ascribing to their words sovereign power among men. But it is better to regard "heaven" and "earth" as the ordinary designation of the whole visible frame of things, and to take the verse as describing the self-sufficiency which gives its opinions and lays down the law about everything, and, on the other hand, the currency and influence which are accorded by the popular voice to the dicta of prosperous worldlings.

That thought prepares the way for the enigmatic verse which follows. There are several obscure points in it. First, the verb in the Hebrew text means *turns* (transitive), which the Hebrew margin corrects into *returns* (intransitive). With the former reading, "his people" is the object of the verb, and the implied subject is the prosperous wicked man, the change to the singular "he" from the plural "they" of the preceding clauses being not unusual in Hebrew. With the latter reading, "his people" is the subject. The next question is to whom the "people" are conceived as belonging. It is, at first sight, natural to think of the frequent Scripture

expression, and to take the "his" as referring to God, and the phrase to mean the true Israel. But the meaning seems rather to be the mob of parasites and hangers-on, who servilely follow the successful sinner, in hope of some crumbs from his table. "Thither" means "to himself," and the whole describes how such a one as the man whose portrait has just been drawn is sure to attract a retinue of dependants, who say as he says, and would fain be what he is. The last clause describes the share of these parasites in their patron's prosperity. "Waters of abundance"—*i.e.*, abundant waters—may be an emblem of the pernicious principles of the wicked, which their followers swallow greedily; but it is more probably a figure for fulness of material good, which rewards the humiliation of servile adherents to the prosperous worldling.

The next group (vv. 11–14) begins with an utterance of unbelief or doubt, but it is difficult to reach certainty as to the speakers. It is very natural to refer the "they" to the last-mentioned persons—namely, the people who have been led to attach themselves to the prosperous sinners, and who, by the example of these, are led to question the reality of God's acquaintance with and moral government of human affairs. The question is, as often, in reality a denial. But "they" may have a more general sense, equivalent to our own colloquial use of it for an indefinite multitude. "They say"—that is, "the common opinion and rumour is." So here, the meaning may be, that the sight of such flushed and flourishing wickedness diffuses widespread and deep-going doubts of God's knowledge, and makes many infidels.

Ewald, Delitzsch, and others take all the verses of this group as spoken by the followers of the ungodly;

and, unquestionably, that view avoids the difficulty of allotting the parts to different unnamed interlocutors. But it raises difficulties of another kind—as, for instance, those of supposing that these adulators should roundly call their patrons wicked, and that an apostate should profess that he has cleansed his heart. The same objections do not hold against the view that these four verses are the utterance, not of the wicked rich man or his coterie of admirers, but of the wider number whose faith has been shaken. There is nothing in the verses which would be unnatural on such lips.

Ver. 11 would then be a question anxiously raised by faith that was beginning to reel; ver. 12 would be a statement of the anomalous fact which staggered it; and vv. 13, 14, the complaint of the afflicted godly. The psalmist's repudiation of a share in such incipient scepticism would begin with ver. 15. There is much in favour of this view of the speakers, but against it is the psalmist's acknowledgment, in ver. 2, that his own confidence in God's moral government had been shaken, of which there is no further trace in the psalm, unless vv. 13, 14, express the conclusion which he had been tempted to draw, and which, as he proceeds to say, he had fought down. If these two verses are ascribed to him, ver. 12 is best regarded as a summary of the whole preceding part, and only ver. 11 as the utterance either of the prosperous sinner and his adherents (in which case it is a question which means denial), or as that of troubled faith (in which case it is a question that would fain be an affirmation, but has been forced unwillingly to regard the very pillars of the universe as trembling).

Vv. 15–18 tell how the psalmist strove with and finally conquered his doubts, and saw enough of the

great arc of the Divine dealings, to be sure that the anomaly, which had exercised his faith, was capable of complete reconciliation with the righteousness of Providence. It is instructive to note that he silenced his doubts, out of regard to "the generation of Thy children"—that is, to the true Israel, the pure in heart. He was tempted to speak as others did not fear to speak, impugning God's justice and proclaiming the uselessness of purity; but he locked his lips, lest his words should prove him untrue to the consideration which he owed to meek and simple hearts, who knew nothing of the speculative difficulties torturing him. He does not say that his speaking would have been sin against God. It would not have been so, if, in speaking, he had longed for confirmation of his wavering faith. But whatever the motive of his words, they might have shaken some lowly believers. Therefore he resolved on silence. Like all wise and devout men, he swallowed his own smoke, and let the process of doubting go on to its end of certainty, one way or another, before he spoke. This psalm, in which he tells how he overcame them, is his first acknowledgment that he had had these temptations to cast away his confidence. Fermentation should be done in the dark. When the process is finished, and the product is clear, it is fit to be produced and drank. Certitudes are meant to be uttered; doubts are meant to be struggled with. The psalmist has set an example which many men need to ponder to-day. It is easy, and it is also cruel, to raise questions which the proposer is not ready to answer.

Silent brooding over his problem did not bring light, as ver. 16 tells us. The more he thought over it, the more insoluble did it seem to him. There are chambers

which the key of thinking will not open. Unwelcome as the lesson is, we have to learn that every lock will not yield to even prolonged and strenuous investigation. The lamp of the Understanding throws its beams far, but there are depths of darkness too deep and dark for them; and they are wisest who know its limits and do not try to use it in regions where it is useless.

But faith finds a path where speculation discerns none. The psalmist "went into the sanctuary (literally, sanctuaries) of God," and there light streamed in on him, in which he saw light. Not mere entrance into the place of worship, but closer approach to the God who dwelt there, cleared away the mists. Communion with God solves many problems which thinking leaves unresolved. The eye which has gazed on God is purged for much vision besides. The disproportion between the deserts and fortunes of good and bad men assumes an altogether different aspect when contemplated in the light of present communion with Him, which brings a blessedness that makes earthly prosperity seem dross, and earthly burdens seem feathers. Such communion, in its seclusion from worldly agitations, enables a man to take calmer, saner views of life, and in its enduring blessedness reveals more clearly the transiency of the creatural good which deceives men with the figment of its permanence. The lesson which the psalmist learned in the solemn stillness of the sanctuary was the end of ungodly prosperity. That changes the aspect of the envied position of the prosperous sinner, for his very prosperity is seen to contribute to his downfall, as well as to make that downfall more tragic by contrast. His sure footing, exempt as he seemed from the troubles and ills that flesh is heir to, was really on a treacherous slope, like smooth sheets of rock on a

mountain-side. To stand on them is to slide down to hideous ruin.

The theme of the end of the prosperous sinners is continued in the next group (vv. 19–22). In ver. 19 the psalmist seems as if standing an amazed spectator of the crash, which tumbles into chaos the solid-seeming fabric of their insolent prosperity. An exclamation breaks from his lips as he looks. And then destruction is foretold for all such, under the solemn and magnificent image of ver. 20. God has seemed to sleep, letting evil run its course; but He "rouses Himself"—that is, comes forth in judicial acts—and as a dreamer remembers his dream, which seemed so real, and smiles at its imaginary terrors or joys, so He will "despise" them, as no more solid nor lasting than phantasms of the night. The end contemplated by the psalmist is not necessarily death, but any sudden overthrow, of which there are many in the experience of the godless. Life is full of such awakings of God, both in regard to individuals and nations, which, if a man duly regards, he will find the problem of the psalm less insoluble than at first it appears. But if there are lives which, being without goodness, are also without chastisement, Death comes at last to such as God's awaking, and a very awful dissipating of earthly prosperity into a shadowy nothing.

The psalmist has no revelation here of future retribution. His vindication of God's justice is not based on that, but simply on the transiency of worldly prosperity, and on its dangerous character. It is "a slippery place," and it is sure to come to an end. It is obvious that there are many other considerations which have to be taken into account, in order to a complete solution of the problem of the psalm. But

the psalmist's solution goes far to lighten the painful perplexity of it; and if we add his succeeding thoughts as to the elements of true blessedness, we have solution enough for peaceful acquiescence, if not for entire understanding. The psalmist's way of finding an answer is even more valuable than the answer which he found. They who dwell in the secret place of the Most High can look on the riddle of this painful world with equanimity, and be content to leave it half unsolved.

Vv. 21, 22, are generally taken as one sentence, and translated as by Delitzsch, "If my heart should grow bitter . . . I should be brutish," etc.; or, as by Hupfeld, "When my heart grew bitter . . . then I was as a beast," etc.; but they are better regarded as the psalmist's penitent explanation of his struggle. "Unbelieving thoughts had fermented in his mind, and a pang of passionate discontent had pierced his inmost being. But the higher self blames the lower self for such folly" (Cheyne, *in loc.*). His recognition that his doubts had their source, not in defect in God's providence, but in his own ignorance and hasty irritation, which took offence without cause, prepares him for the sweet, clear note of purely spiritual aspiration and fruition which follows in the next strophe.

He had all but lost his hold of God; but though his feet had almost gone astray, his hand had been grasped by God, and that strong hold had kept him from utterly falling. The pledge of continual communion with God is not our own vacillating, wayward hearts, but God's gentle, strong clasp, which will not let us go. Thus conscious of constant fellowship, and feeling thrillingly God's touch in his inmost spirit, the psalmist rises to a height of joyous assurance, far above

doubts and perplexities caused by the unequal distribution of earth's trivial good. For him, all life will be illumined by God's counsel, which will guide him as a shepherd leads his sheep, and which he will obey as a sheep follows his shepherd. How small the delights of the prosperous men seem now! And can there be an end to that sweet alliance, such as smites earthly good? There are blessings which bear in themselves assurance of their own undyingness; and this psalmist, who had nothing to say of the future retribution falling on the sinner whose delights were confined to earth, feels that death cannot put a period to a union so blessed and spiritual as was his with God. To him, "afterwards" was irradiated with light from present blessedness; and a solemnly joyful conviction springs in his soul, which he casts into words that glance at the story of Enoch's translation, from which "take" is quoted (*cf.* Psalm xlix. 16). Whether we translate "with glory" or "to glory," there can be no question that the psalmist is looking beyond life on earth to dwelling with God in glory. We have, in this utterance, the expression of the conviction, inseparable from any true, deep communion with God, that such communion can never be at the mercy of Death. The real proof of a life beyond the grave is the resurrection of Jesus; and the pledge of it is present enjoyment of fellowship with God.

Such thoughts lift the psalmist to a height from which earth's troubles show small, and as they diminish, the perplexity arising from their distribution diminishes in proportion. They fade away altogether, when he feels how rich he is in possessing God. Surely the very summit of devotional rapture is reached in the immortal words which follow! Heaven without

God were a waste to this man. With God, he needs not nor desires anything on earth. If the impossible should be actual, and heart as well as flesh should fail, his naked self would be clothed and rich, steadfast and secure, as long as he had God; and he is so closely knit to God, that he knows that he will not lose Him though he dies, but have Him for his very own for ever. What care need he have how earth's vain goods come and go? Whatever outward calamities or poverty may be his lot, there is no riddle in that Divine government which thus enriches the devout heart; and the richest ungodly man is poor, because he shuts himself out from the one all-sufficient and enduring wealth.

A final pair of verses, answering to the introductory pair, gathers up the double truth, which the psalmist has learned to grasp more firmly by occasion of his doubts. To be absent from God is to perish. Distance from Him is separation from life. Drawing near to Him is the only good; and the psalmist has deliberately chosen it as *his* good, let worldly prosperity come or go as it list, or, rather, as God shall choose. By the effort of his own volition he has made God his refuge, and, safe in Him, he can bear the sorrows of the godly, and look unenvying on the fleeting prosperity of sinners, while, with insight drawn from communion, he can recount with faith and praise all God's works, and find in none of them a stumbling-block, nor fail to find in any of them material for a song of thankfulness.

PSALM LXXIV.

1 Why, O God, hast Thou cast us off for ever?
[Why] smokes Thine anger against the flock of Thy pasture?
2 Remember Thy congregation [which] Thou didst acquire of old,
Didst redeem [to be] the tribe of Thine inheritance,
Mount Zion, on which Thou hast dwelt.
3 Lift up Thy steps to the everlasting ruins,
The enemy has marred everything in the sanctuary.

4 Thine adversaries roared in the midst of the place where Thou dost meet [us],
They set up their signs as signs.
5 They seem like one who heaves on high
Axes against a thicket of trees.
6 And now—its carved work altogether
With hatchet and hammers they break down.
7 They have set on fire Thy sanctuary,
[Rasing it] to the ground, they have profaned the dwelling-place of Thy name.
8 They have said in their heart, Let us crush them altogether.
They have burned all meeting-places of God in the land.
9 Our signs we see not,
There is no prophet any more,
And there is no one who knows how long.

10 How long, O God, shall the adversary reproach?
Shall the enemy despise Thy name for ever?
11 Why dost Thou draw back Thy hand, even Thy right hand?
From the midst of Thy bosom [pluck it and] consume [them].

12 Yet God is my king from of old,
Working salvations in the midst of the earth.
13 Thou, Thou didst divide the sea by Thy strength,
Didst break the heads of monsters on the waters.

14 Thou, Thou didst crush the heads of Leviathan,
That Thou mightest give him [to be] meat for a people—the desert beasts.
15 Thou, Thou didst cleave [a way for] fountain and torrent;
Thou, Thou didst dry up perennial streams.
16 Thine is day, Thine also is night;
Thou, Thou didst establish light and sun.
17 Thou, Thou didst set all the bounds of the earth;
Summer and winter, Thou, Thou didst form them.

18 Remember this—the enemy reviles Jehovah,
And a foolish people despises Thy name.
19 Give not up to the company of greed Thy turtle dove,
The company of Thine afflicted forget not for ever.
20 Look upon the covenant,
For the dark places of the land are full of habitations of violence.
21 Let not the oppressed turn back ashamed,
Let the afflicted and needy praise Thy name.
22 Rise, O God, plead Thine own cause,
Remember Thy reproach from the foolish all the day.
23 Forget not the voice of Thine adversaries,
The tumult of them which rise against Thee goes up continually.

TWO periods only correspond to the circumstances described in this psalm and its companion (lxxix.) —namely, the Chaldean invasion and sack of Jerusalem, and the persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes. The general situation outlined in the psalm fits either of these; but, of its details, some are more applicable to the former and others to the later period. The later date is strongly supported by such complaints as those of the cessation of prophecy (ver. 9), the flaunting of the invaders' signs in the sanctuary (ver. 4), and the destruction by fire of all the "meeting-places of God in the land" (ver. 8). On the other hand, the earlier date better fits other features of the psalm—since Antiochus did not destroy or burn, but simply profaned the Temple, though he did, indeed, set fire to the gates and porch, but to these only. It would appear that, on either hypothesis, something must be allowed for poetical

colouring. Calvin, whom Cheyne follows in this, accounts for the introduction of the burning of the Temple into a psalm referring to the desolation wrought by Antiochus, by the supposition that the psalmist speaks in the name of the "faithful, who, looking on the horrid devastation of the Temple, and being warned by so sad a sight, carried back their thoughts to that conflagration by which it had been destroyed by the Chaldeans, and wove the two calamities together into one." It is less difficult to pare down the statement as to the burning of the Temple so as to suit the later date, than that as to the silence of prophecy and the other characteristics mentioned, so as to fit the earlier. The question is still further complicated by the similarities between the two psalms and Jeremiah (compare ver. 4 with Lam. ii. 7, and ver. 9 with Lam. ii. 9). The prophet's well-known fondness for quotations gives probability, other things being equal, to the supposition that he is quoting the psalm, which would, in that case, be older than Lamentations. But this inference scarcely holds good, if there are other grounds on which the later date of the psalm is established. It would be very natural in a singer of the Maccabean period to go back to the prophet whose sad strains had risen at another black hour. On the whole, the balance is in favour of the later date.

The psalm begins with a complaining cry to God (vv. 1–3), which passes into a piteous detail of the nation's misery (vv. 4–9), whence it rises into petition (vv. 10, 11), stays trembling faith by gazing upon His past deeds of help and the wonders of His creative power (vv. 12–17), and closes with beseeching God to vindicate the honour of His own name by the deliverance of His people (vv. 18–23).

The main emphasis of the prayer in vv. 1–3 lies on the pleas which it presents, drawn from Israel's relation to God. The characteristic Asaphic name "Thy flock" stands in ver. 1, and appeals to the Shepherd, both on the ground of His tenderness and of His honour as involved in the security of the sheep. A similar appeal lies in the two words "acquire" and "redeem," in both of which the deliverance from Egypt is referred to,—the former expression suggesting the price at which the acquisition was made, as well as the obligations of ownership; and the latter, the office of the Goel, the Kinsman-Redeemer, on whom devolved the duty of obtaining satisfaction for blood. The double designations of Israel as "Thy congregation" and as "the tribe of Thine inheritance" probably point to the religious and civil aspects of the national life. The strongest plea is put last—namely, God's dwelling on Zion. For all these reasons, the psalmist asks and expects Him to come with swift footsteps to the desolations, which have endured so long that the impatience of despair blends with the cry for help, and calls them "everlasting," even while it prays that they may be built up again. The fact that the enemy of God and of His flock has marred everything *in the sanctuary* is enough, the psalmist thinks, to move God to action.

The same thought, that the nation's calamities are really dishonouring to God, and therefore worthy of His intervention, colours the whole of the description of these in vv. 4–9. The invaders are "*Thine* adversaries." It is "in the place where *Thou* didst meet us" that their bestial noises, like those of lions over their prey, echo. It is "*Thy* sanctuary" which they have set on fire, "the dwelling-place of *Thy* name" which they have profaned. It is "*Thy* meeting-places" which

they have burned throughout the land. Only at the end of the sad catalogue is the misery of the people touched on, and that, not so much as inflicted by human foes, as by the withdrawal of God's Spirit. This is, in fact, the dominant thought of the whole psalm. It says very little about the sufferings resulting from the success of the enemy, but constantly recurs to the insult to God, and the reproach adhering to His name therefrom. The essence of it all is in the concluding prayer, "Plead *Thine own* cause" (ver. 22).

The vivid description of devastation in these verses presents some difficulties in detail, which call for brief treatment. The "signs" in ver. 4 *b* may be taken as military, such as banners or the like; but it is more in accordance with the usage of the word to suppose them to be religious emblems, or possibly idols, such as Antiochus thrust upon the Jews. In vv. 5 and 6 a change of tense represents the action described in them, as if in progress at the moment before the singer's eyes. "They seem" is literally "He is known" (or *makes himself known*), which may refer to the invaders, the change from plural to singular being frequent in Hebrew; or it may be taken impersonally, = "It seems." In either case it introduces a comparison between the hacking and hewing by the spoilers in the Temple, and the work of a woodman swinging on high his axe in the forest. "And now" seems to indicate the next step in the scene, which the psalmist picturesquely conceives as passing before his horror-stricken sight. The end of that ill-omened activity is that at last it succeeds in shattering the carved work, which, in the absence of statues, was the chief artistic glory of the Temple. All is hewed down, as if it were no more than so much growing timber. With ver. 7 the tenses

change to the calmer tone of historical narration. The plundered Temple is set on fire—a point which, as has been noticed above, is completely applicable only to the Chaldean invasion. Similarly, the next clause, "they have profaned the dwelling-place of Thy name to the ground," does not apply in literality to the action of Antiochus, who did indeed desecrate, but did not destroy, the Temple. The expression is a pregnant one, and calls for some such supplement as is given above, which, however, dilutes its vigour while it elucidates its meaning. In ver. 8 the word "let us crush them" has been erroneously taken as a noun, and rendered "their brood," a verb like "we will root out" being supplied. So the LXX. and some of the old versions, followed by Hitzig and Baethgen. But, as Delitzsch well asks,—Why are only the children to be rooted out? and why should the object of the action be expressed, and not rather the action, of which the object would be self-evident? The "meeting-places of God in the land" cannot be old sanctuaries, nor the high places, which were Israel's sin; for no psalmist could have adduced the destruction of these as a reason for God's intervention. They can only be the synagogues. The expression is a strong argument for the later date of the psalm. Equally strong is the lament in ver. 9 over the removal of the "signs"—*i.e.*, as in ver. 4, the emblems of religion, or the sacrifices and festivals, suppressed by Antiochus, which were the tokens of the covenant between God and Israel. The silence of prophecy cannot be alleged of the Chaldean period without some straining of facts and of the words here; nor is it true that then there was universal ignorance of the duration of the calamity, for Jeremiah had foretold it.

Vv. 10 and 11 are the kernel of the psalm, the

rest of which is folded round them symmetrically. Starting from this centre and working outwards, we note that it is preceded by six verses dilating on the profanations of the name of God, and followed by six setting forth the glories of that name in the past. The connection of these two portions of the psalm is obvious. They are, as it were, the inner shell round the kernel. The outer shell is the prayer in three verses which begins the psalm, and that in six verses which closes it. Ver. 10 takes up the despairing "How long" from the end of the preceding portion, and turns it into a question to God. It is best to ask Him, when ignorance pains us. But the interrogation does not so much beg for enlightenment as to the duration of the calamity as for its abbreviation. It breathes not precisely impatience, but longing that a state of things so dishonouring to God should end. That aspect, and not personal suffering, is prominent in the verse. It is "Thy name" which is insulted by the adversaries' actions, and laid open to their contempt, as the name of a Deity powerless to protect His worshippers. Their action "reproaches," and His inaction lets them "despise," His name. The psalmist cannot endure that this condition should drag on indefinitely, as if "for ever," and his prayer-question "How long?" is next exchanged for another similar blending of petition and inquiry, "*Why* dost Thou draw back Thy hand?" Both are immediately translated into that petition which they both really mean. "From the midst of Thy bosom consume," is a pregnant phrase, like that in ver. 7 *b*, and has to be completed as above, though, possibly, the verb stands absolutely as equivalent to "make an end"—*i.e.*, of such a state of things.

The psalmist's petition is next grounded on the

revelation of God's name in Israel's past, and in creative acts of power. These at once encourage him to expect that God will pluck His hand out from the folds of His robe, where it lies inactive, and appeal to God to be what He has been of old, and to rescue the name which He has thus magnified from insult. There is singular solemnity in the emphatic reiteration of "Thou" in these verses. The Hebrew does not usually express the pronominal nominative to a verb, unless special attention is to be called to it; but in these verses it does so uniformly, with one exception, and the sevenfold repetition of the word brings forcibly into view the Divine personality and former deeds which pledge God to act now. Remembrance of past wonders made present misery more bitter, but it also fanned into a flame the spark of confidence that the future would be like the past. One characteristic of the Asaph psalms is wistful retrospect, which is sometimes the basis of rebuke, and sometimes of hope, and sometimes of deepened sorrow, but is here in part appeal to God and in part consolation. The familiar instances of His working drawn from the Exodus history appear in the psalm. First comes the dividing of the Red Sea, which is regarded chiefly as occasioning the destruction of the Egyptians, who are symbolised by the "sea-monsters" and by "leviathan" (the crocodile). Their fate is an omen of what the psalmist hopes may befall the oppressors of his own day. There is great poetic force in the representation that the strong hand, which by a stroke parted the waters, crushed by the same blow the heads of the foul creatures who "floated many a rood" on them. And what an end for the pomp of Pharaoh and his host, to provide a meal for jackals and the other beasts of the desert, who tear the

corpses strewing the barren shore! The meaning is completely misapprehended when "the people inhabiting the wilderness" is taken to be wild desert tribes. The expression refers to animals, and its use as designating them has parallels (as Prov. xxx. 25, 26).

In ver. 15 another pregnant expression occurs, which is best filled out as above, the reference being to cleaving the rock for the flow of water, with which is contrasted in *b* the drying up of the Jordan. Thus the whole of the Exodus period is covered. It is noteworthy that the psalmist adduces only wonders wrought on waters, being possibly guided in his selection by the familiar poetic use of floods and seas as emblems of hostile power and unbridled insolence. From the wonders of history he passes to those of creation, and chiefly of that might by which times alternate and each constituent of the Kosmos has its appointed limits. Day and night, summer and winter, recur by God's continual operation. Is there to be no dawning for Israel's night of weeping, and no summer making glad the winter of its discontent? "Thou didst set all the bounds of the earth,"—wilt Thou not bid back this surging ocean which has transgressed its limits and filled the breadth of Thy land? All the lights in the sky, and chiefly the greatest of them, Thou didst establish,—surely Thou wilt end this eclipse in which Thy people grope.

Thus the psalmist lifts himself to the height of confident though humble prayer, with which the psalm closes, recurring to the opening tones. Its centre is, as we have seen, a double remonstrance—"How long?" and "Why?" The encircling circumference is earnest supplication, of which the keynote is "Remember" (vv 2 and 18).

The gist of this closing prayer is the same appeal to God to defend His own honour, which we have found in the former verses. It is put in various forms here. Twice (vv. 18 and 22) God is besought to remember the reproach and contumely heaped on His name, and apparently warranted by His inaction. The claim of Israel for deliverance is based in ver. 19 upon its being "*Thy* turtle dove," which therefore cannot be abandoned without sullying Thy fame. The psalmist spreads the "covenant" before God, as reminding Him of His obligations under it. He asks that such deeds may be done as will give occasion to the afflicted and needy to "praise Thy name," which is being besmirched by their calamities. Finally, in wonderfully bold words, he calls on God to take up what is, after all, "His own" quarrel, and, if the cry of the afflicted does not move Him, to listen to the loud voices of those who blaspheme Him all the day. Reverent earnestness of supplication sometimes sounds like irreverence; but, "when the heart's deeps boil in earnest," God understands the meaning of what sounds strange, and recognises the profound trust in His faithfulness and love which underlies bold words.

The precise rendering of ver. 19 is very doubtful. The word rendered above by "company" may mean *life* or *a living creature*, or, collectively, a *company* of such. It has been taken in all these meanings here, and sometimes in one of them in the first clause, and in another in the second, as most recently by Baethgen, who renders "Abandon not to *the beast*" in *a*, and "*The life of* thine afflicted" in *b*. But it must have the same meaning in both clauses, and the form of the word shows that it must be construed in both with a following "of." If so, the rendering adopted above

is best, though it involves taking the word rendered "greed" (lit., soul) in a somewhat doubtful sense. This rendering is adopted in the R.V. (margin), and is, on the whole, the least difficult, and yields a probable sense. Delitzsch recognises the necessity for giving the ambiguous word the same meaning in both clauses, and takes that meaning to be "creature," which suits well enough in *a*, but gives a very harsh meaning to *b*. "Forget not Thy poor animals for ever" is surely an impossible rendering. Other attempts have been made to turn the difficulty by textual alteration. Hupfeld would transpose two words in *a*, and so gets "Give not up to rage the life of Thy dove." Cheyne corrects the difficult word into "to the sword," and Graetz follows Dyserinck in preferring "to death," or Krochmal, who reads "to destruction." If the existing text is retained, probably the rendering adopted above is best.

PSALM LXXV.

1 We give thanks to Thee, O God, we give thanks;
And [that] Thy name is near, Thy wondrous works declare

2 "When I seize the set time,
I, I judge [in] equity.
3 Dissolved [in fear] are earth and its inhabitants:
I, I set firm its pillars. Selah.
4 I say to the fools, Be not foolish:
And to the wicked, Lift not up the horn:
5 Lift not up your horn on high;
Speak not with stiff neck."

6 For not from east, nor from west,
And not from the wilderness is lifting up.
7 For God is judge:
This one He abases, and that one He lifts up.
8 For a cup is in the hands of Jehovah,
And it foams with wine; it is full of mixture,
And He pours out from it:
Yea, its dregs shall all the wicked of the earth gulp down and drink.

9 And as for me, I will declare [it] for ever,
I will harp to the God of Jacob.
10 And all the horns of the wicked will I cut off:
Exalted shall be the horns of the righteous.

THIS psalm deals with the general thought of God's judgment in history, especially on heathen nations. It has no clear marks of connection with any particular instance of that judgment. The prevalent opinion has been that it refers, like the next psalm, to the destruction of Sennacherib's army. There are in it slight resemblances to Psalm xlvi., and to Isaiah's

prophecies regarding that event, which support the conjecture. Cheyne seems to waver, as on page 148 of "Orig. of Psalt." he speaks of "the two Maccabean psalms, lxxiv. and lxxv.," and on page 166 concludes that they "may be Maccabean, . . . but we cannot claim for this view the highest degree of probability, especially as neither psalm refers to any warlike deeds of Israelites. It is safer, I think, to . . . assign them at the earliest to one of the happier parts of the Persian age." It is apparently still safer to refrain from assigning them to any precise period.

The kernel of the psalm is a majestic Divine utterance, proclaiming God's judgment as at hand. The limits of that Divine word are doubtful, but it is best taken as occupying two pairs of verses (2–5). It is preceded by one verse of praise, and followed by three (6–8) of warning spoken by the psalmist, and by two (9, 10) in which he again praises God the Judge, and stands forth as an instrument of His judicial acts.

In ver. 1, which is as a prelude to the great Voice from heaven, we hear the nation giving thanks beforehand for the judgment which is about to fall. The second part of the verse is doubtful. It may be taken thus: "And Thy name is near; they (*i.e.*, men) declare Thy wondrous works." So Delitzsch, who comments: The Church "welcomes the future acts of God with fervent thanks, and all they that belong to it declare beforehand God's wondrous works." Several modern scholars, among whom are Grätz, Baethgen, and Cheyne, adopt a textual alteration which gives the reading, "They who call upon Thy name declare," etc. But the rendering of the A.V., which is also that of Hupfeld and Perowne, gives a good meaning. All God's deeds in history proclaim that He is ever at hand to help. His name

is His character as revealed by His self-manifestation; and this is the glad thanks-evoking lesson, taught by all the past and by the judicial act of which the psalm is the precursor—that He is near to deliver His people. As Deut. iv. 7 has it, "What nation is there that hath God so near unto them?"

The Divine voice breaks in with majestic abruptness, as in Psalm xlvi. 10. It proclaims impending judgment, which will restore society, dissolving in dread or moral corruption, and will abase insolent wickedness, which is therefore exhorted to submission. In ver. 2 two great principles are declared—one in regard to the time and the other in regard to the animating spirit of God's judgment. Literally, the first words of the verse run, "When I lay hold of the appointed time." The thought is that He has His own appointed time at which His power will flash forth into act, and that till that moment arrives evil is permitted to run its course, and insolent men to play their "fantastic tricks" before an apparently indifferent or unobserving God. His servants are tempted to think that He delays too long; His enemies, that He will never break His silence. But the slow hand traverses the dial in time, and at last the hour strikes and the crash comes punctually at the moment. The purposes of delay are presented in Scripture as twofold: on the one hand, "that the long-suffering of God may lead to repentance"; and on the other, that evil may work itself out and show its true character. To learn the lesson that, "when the set time is come," judgment will fall, would save the oppressed from impatience and despondency and the oppressor from dreams of impunity. It is a law fruitful for the interpretation of the world's history. The other fundamental truth in this verse is

that the principle of God's judgment is equity, rigid adherence to justice, so that every act of man's shall receive accurately "its just recompense of reward." The "I" of ver. 2 *b* is emphatic. It brings to view the lofty personality of the Judge, and asserts the operation of a Divine hand in human affairs, while it also lays the basis for the assurance that, the judgment being His, and He being what He is, it must be "according to truth."

Such a "set time" has arrived, as ver. 3 proceeds to declare. Oppression and corruption have gone so far that "the earth and its inhabitants" are as if "dissolved." All things are rushing to ruin. The psalmist does not distinguish between the physical and the moral here. His figure is employed in reference to both orders, which he regards as indissolubly connected. Possibly he is echoing Psalm xlvi. 6, "The earth melted," though there the "melting" is an expression for dread occasioned by God's voice, and here rather refers to the results of "the proud man's wrong." At such a supreme moment, when the solid framework of society and of the world itself seems to be on the point of dissolution, the mighty Divine Personality intervenes; that strong hand is thrust forth to grasp the tottering pillars and stay their fall; or, in plain words, God Himself then intervenes to re-establish the moral order of society, and thus to save the sufferers. (Comp. Hannah's song in 1 Sam. ii. 8.) That intervention has necessarily two aspects, being on the one hand restorative, and on the other punitive. Therefore in vv. 4 and 5 follow Divine warnings to the "fools" and "wicked," whose insolent boasting and tyranny have provoked it. The word rendered "fools" seems to include the idea of boastfulness as well as folly in the Biblical sense of that word,

which points to moral rather than to merely intellectual aberration. "Lifting up the horn" is a symbol of arrogance. According to the accents, the word rendered "stiff" is not to be taken as attached to "neck," but as the object of the verb "speak," the resulting translation being, "Speak not arrogance with a [stretched out] neck"; and thus Delitzsch would render. But it is more natural to take the word in its usual construction as an epithet of "neck," expressive of superciliously holding a high head. Cheyne follows Baethgen in altering the text so as to read "rock" for "neck"—a slight change which is supported by the LXX. rendering ("Speak not unrighteousness against God")—and renders "nor speak arrogantly of the rock." Like the other advocates of a Maccabean date, he finds here a reference to the mad blasphemies of Antiochus Epiphanes; but the words would suit Rabshakeh's railings quite as well.

The exact point where the Divine oracle passes into the psalmist's own words is doubtful. Ver. 7 is evidently his; and that verse is so closely connected with ver. 6 that it is best to make the break at the end of ver. 5, and to suppose that what follows is the singer's application of the truths which he has heard. Two renderings of ver. 6 *b* are possible, which, though very different in English, turn on the minute difference in the Hebrew of one vowel sign. The same letters spell the Hebrew word meaning *mountains* and that meaning *lifting up*. With one punctuation of the preceding word "wilderness," we must translate "from the wilderness of mountains"; with another, the two words are less closely connected, and we must render, "from the wilderness is lifting up." If the former rendering is adopted, the verse is incomplete, and some phrase

like "help comes" must be supplied, as Delitzsch suggests. But "lifting up" occurs so often in this psalm, that it is more natural to take the word in that meaning here, especially as the next verse ends with it, in a different tense, and thus makes a sort of rhyme with this verse. "The wilderness of mountains," too, is a singular designation, either for the Sinaitic peninsula or for Egypt, or for the wilderness of Judah, which have all been suggested as intended here. "The wilderness" stands for the south, and thus three cardinal points are named. Why is the north omitted? If "lifting up" means deliverance, the omission may be due to the fact that Assyria (from which the danger came, if we adopt the usual view of the occasion of the psalm) lay to the north. But the meaning in the rest of the psalm is not *deliverance*, and the psalmist is addressing the "foolish boasters" here; and that consideration takes away the force of such an explanation of the omission. Probably no significance attaches to it. The general idea is simply that "lifting up" does not come from any quarter of earth, but, as the next verse goes on to say, solely from God. How absurd, then, is the self-sufficient loftiness of godless men! How vain to look along the low levels of earth, when all true elevation and dignity come from God! The very purpose of His judicial energy is to abase the lofty and raise the low. His hand lifts up, and there is no secure or lasting elevation but that which He effects. His hand casts down, and that which attracts His lightnings is "the haughtiness of man." The outburst of His judgment works like a volcanic eruption, which flings up elevations in valleys and shatters lofty peaks. The features of the country are changed after it, and the world looks new. The metaphor of ver. 8,

in which judgment is represented as a cup of foaming wine, which God puts to the lips of the nations, receives great expansion in the prophets, especially in Jeremiah, and recurs in the Apocalypse. There is a grim contrast between the images of festivity and hospitality called up by the picture of a host presenting the wine cup to his guests, and the stern compulsion which makes the "wicked" gulp down the nauseous draught held by God to their reluctant lips. The utmost extremity of punitive inflictions, unflinchingly inflicted, is suggested by the terrible imagery. And the judgment is to be world-wide; for "all the wicked of the earth" are to drink, and that to the dregs.

And how does the prospect affect the psalmist? It moves him, first, to solemn praise—not only because God has proved Himself by these terrible things in righteousness to be the God of His people, but also because He has thereby manifested His own character as righteous and hating evil. It is no selfish nor cruel joy which stirs in devout hearts, when God comes forth in history and smites oppressing insolence. It is but a spurious benevolence which affects to recoil from the conception of a God who judges and, when needful, smites. This psalmist not only praised, but in his degree vowed to imitate.

The last verse is best understood as his declaration of his own purpose, though some commentators have proposed to transfer it to the earlier part of the psalm, regarding it as part of the Divine oracle. But it is in its right place where it stands. God's servants are His instruments in carrying out His judgments; and there is a very real sense in which all of them should seek to fight against dominant evil and to cripple the power of tyrannous godlessness.

PSALM LXXVI.

1 Known in Judah is God,
In Israel is His name great.
2 And in Salem was His tent [pitched],
And His dwelling in Zion.
3 There He shivered the lightnings of the bow,
Shield and sword and battle. Selah.

4 Effulgent art Thou [and] glorious
From the mountains of prey [everlasting mountains ?].
5 Spoiled are the stout of heart, they slumber [into] their sleep,
And none of the men of might have found their hands.
6 At Thy rebuke, O God of Jacob,
Both chariot and horse are sunk in deep sleep.

7 Thou! dread art Thou,
And who can stand before Thee, in the time of Thine anger ?
8 From heaven didst Thou make judgment heard,
Earth feared and was stilled,
9 At the rising of God for judgment
To save all the afflicted of the earth. Selah.

10 For the wrath of man shall praise Thee,
[With] the residue of wraths Thou girdest Thyself.
11 Vow and pay to Jehovah your God,
Let all around Him bring presents to the Terrible One.
12 He cuts down the [lofty] spirit of princes,
A dread to the kings of the earth.

IN contents and tone this psalm is connected with Psalms xlvi. and xlviii. No known event corresponds so closely with its allusions as the destruction of Sennacherib's army, to which the LXX. in its superscription refers it. The singer is absorbed in the one

tremendous judgment which had delivered the dwelling-place of Jehovah. His song has but one theme—God's forth-flashing of judgment on Zion's foes. One note of thankfulness sounds at the close, but till then all is awe. The psalm is divided into four strophes, of three verses each. The former two describe the act; the latter two deal with its results, in an awed world and thankful praise.

The emphatic words in the first strophe are those which designate the scene of the Divine act. The glow of humble pride, of wonder and thankfulness, is perceptible in the fourfold reiteration—"in Judah, in Israel, in Salem, in Zion"; all which names are gathered up in the eloquent "There" of ver. 3. The true point of view from which to regard God's acts is that they are His Self-revelation. The reason why Israel is the object of the acts which manifest His name is that there He has chosen to dwell. And, since He dwells there, the special act of judgment which the psalm celebrates was there performed. "The lightnings of the bow" picturesquely designate arrows, from their swift flight and deadly impact. (Compare Psalm xlvi. 9.)

The second strophe (vv. 4–6) comes closer to the fact celebrated, and describes, with magnificent sweep, brevity, and vividness, the death sleep of the enemy. But, before it shows the silent corpses, it lifts one exclamation of reverence to the God who has thus manifested His power. The word rendered "Effulgent" is doubtful, and by a slight transposition of letters becomes, as in ver. 7 which begins the next strophe, "dread." In ver. 4*b* the rendering "more excellent than," etc., yields a comparison which can scarcely be called worthy. It is little to say of God that He is more glorious than the enemies' "mountains of prey,"

though Delitzsch tries to recommend this rendering, by supposing that God is represented as towering above "the Lebanon of the hostile army of peoples." The Hebrew idiom expresses comparison by the preposition *from* appended to the adjective in its simple form, and it is best here to take the construction as indicating point of departure rather than comparison. God comes forth as "glorious," from the lofty heights where He sits supreme. But "mountains of prey" is a singular phrase, which can only be explained by the supposition that God is conceived of as a Conqueror, who has laid up His spoils in His inaccessible store-house on high. But the LXX. translates "*everlasting* mountains," which fits the context well, and implies a text, which might easily be misinterpreted as meaning "prey," which misinterpretation may afterwards have crept into the body of the text. If this alteration is not adopted, the meaning will be as just stated.

Ver. 5 gives some support to the existing text, by its representation of the stout-hearted foe as "spoiled." They are robbed of their might, their weapons, and their life. How graphically the psalmist sets before the eyes of his readers the process of destruction from its beginning! He shows us the warriors falling asleep in the drowsiness of death. How feeble their "might" now! One vain struggle, as in the throes of death, and the hands which shot the "lightnings of the bow" against Zion are stiff for evermore. One word from the sovereign lips of the God of Jacob, and all the noise of the camp is hushed, and we look out upon a field of the dead, lying in awful stillness, dreamlessly sleeping their long slumber.

The third strophe passes from description of the destruction of the enemy to paint its widespread results

in the manifestation to a hushed world of God's judgment. In it anger and love are wondrously blended; and while no creature can bear the terrible blaze of His face, nor endure the weight of His onset "in the time of His anger," the most awful manifestations thereof have a side of tenderness and an inner purpose of blessing. The core of judgment is mercy. It is worthy of God to smite the oppressor and to save the "afflicted," who not only suffer, but trust. When He makes His judgments reverberate from on high, earth should keep an awed stillness, as nature does when thunder peals. When some gigantic and hoary iniquity crashes to its fall, there is a moment of awed silence after the hideous tumult.

The last strophe is mainly a summons to praise God for His manifestation of delivering judgment. Ver. 10 is obscure. The first clause is intelligible enough. Since God magnifies His name by His treatment of opposing men, who set themselves against Him, their very foaming fury subserves His praise. That is a familiar thought with all the Scripture writers who meditate on God's dealings. But the second clause is hard. Whose "wraths" are spoken of in it? God's or man's? The change from the singular ("wrath of man") to plural ("wraths") in *b* makes it all but certain that God's fulness of "wrath" is meant here. It is set over against the finite and puny "wrath" of men, as an ocean might be contrasted with a shallow pond. If so, God's girding Himself with the residue of His own wrath will mean that, after every such forth-putting of it as the psalm has been hymning, there still remains an unexhausted store ready to flame out if need arise. It is a stern and terrible thought of God, but it is solemnly true. His loving-kindness out-measures

man's, and so does His judicial judgment. All Divine attributes partake of Infinitude, and the stores of His punitive anger are not less deep than those of His gentle goodness.

Therefore men are summoned to vow and pay their vows; and while Israel is called to worship, the nation around, who have seen that field of the dead, are called to do homage and bring tribute to Him who, as it solemnly shows, can cut off the breath of the highest or can cut down their pride, as a grape-gatherer does the ripe cluster (for such is the allusion in the word "cuts down"). The last clause of the psalm, which stands somewhat disconnected from the preceding, gathers up the lessons of the tremendous event which inspired it, when it sets Him forth as to be feared by the kings of the earth.

PSALM LXXVII.

1 [I would lift] my voice to God and cry;
[I would lift] my voice to God, that He may give ear to me.
2 In the day of my straits I sought the Lord:
My hand was stretched out in the night without ceasing;
My soul refused to be comforted.
3 [When] I remember God, I must sigh;
[When] I muse, my spirit is covered [with gloom]. Selah.

4 Thou hast held open the guards of my eyes:
I am buffeted, and cannot speak.
5 I considered the days of old,
The years of ancient times.
6 I would remember my song in the night:
In my heart I would muse,—and my spirit made anxious search.

7 Will the Lord cast off for ever?
And will He continue no more to be favourable?
8 Is His loving-kindness ended for ever?
Has His promise failed for all generations?
9 Has God forgotten to be gracious?
Or has He in anger drawn in His compassions? Selah.

10 Then I said, It is my sickness;
[But I will remember] the years of the right hand of the Most High.
11 I will celebrate the deeds of Jah;
For I will remember Thy wonders of old.
12 And I will meditate on all Thy work,
And will muse on Thy doings.

13 O God, in holiness is Thy way:
Who is a great God like God?
14 Thou, Thou art the God who doest wonders:
Thou hast made known among the peoples Thy strength.

15 Thou hast redeemed with Thine arm Thy people,
The sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah.

16 The waters saw Thee, O God;
The waters saw Thee, they writhed in pangs:
Yea, the abysses trembled.
17 The clouds were poured out [in] water;
The skies gave [forth] a voice:
Yea, Thine arrows went to and fro.
18 The voice of Thy thunder was in [Thy] chariot wheel;
Lightnings illumined the world:
The earth trembled and shook.
19 In the sea was Thy way,
And Thy paths in great waters,
And Thy footprints were not known.
20 Thou leadest Thy people like sheep,
By the hand of Moses and Aaron.

THE occasion of the profound sadness of the first part of this psalm may be inferred from the thoughts which brighten it into hope in the second. These were the memories of past national deliverance. It is natural to suppose that present national disasters were the causes of the sorrow which enveloped the psalmist's spirit and suggested questions of despair, only saved from being blasphemous because they were so wistful. But it by no means follows that the singer is simply the personified nation. The piercing tone of individual grief is too clear, especially in the introductory verses, to allow of that hypothesis. Rather, the psalmist has taken into his heart the troubles of his people. Public calamity has become personal pain. What dark epoch has left its marks in this psalm remains uncertain. If Delitzsch's contention that Habakkuk iii. is in part drawn from it were indubitably established, the attribution of the psalm to the times of Josiah would be plausible; but there is, at least, room for doubt whether there has been borrowing, and if so,

which is original and which echo. The calamities of the Exile in their severity and duration would give reasonable ground for the psalmist's doubts whether God had not cast off His people for ever. No brief or partial eclipse of His favour would supply adequate occasion for these.

The psalm falls into two parts, in the former of which (vv. 1–9) deepest gloom wraps the singer's spirit, while in the latter (vv. 10–20) the clouds break. Each of these parts falls into three strophes, usually of three verses; but in the concluding strophe, consisting of five, Selah stands at the end of the first and third, and is not present at the end of the second, because it is more closely connected with the third than with the first. In like manner the first strophe of the second part (vv. 10–12) has no Selah, but the second has (vv. 13–15); the closing strophe (vv. 16–20) being thus parted off.

The psalmist's agitation colours his language, which fluctuates in the first six verses between expressions of resolve or desire (vv. 1, 3, 6) and simple statement of fact (vv. 2, 4, 5). He has prayed long and earnestly, and nothing has been laid in answer on his outstretched palm. Therefore his cry has died down into a sigh. He fain would lift his voice to God, but dark thoughts make him dumb for supplication, and eloquent only in self-pitying monologue. A man must have waded through like depths to understand this pathetic bewilderment of spirit. They who glide smoothly over a sunlit surface of sea little know the terrors of sinking, with choked lungs, into the abyss. A little experience will go further than much learning in penetrating the meaning of these moanings of lamed faith. They begin with an elliptical phrase, which, in its fragmentary character, reveals the psalmist's discomposure. "My

voice to God" evidently needs some such completion as is supplied above; and the form of the following verb ("cry") suggests that the supplied one should express wish or effort. The repetition of the phrase in 1 *b* strengthens the impression of agitation. The last words of that clause may be a petition, "give ear," but are probably better taken as above. The psalmist would fain cry to God, that he may be heard. He has cried, as he goes on to tell in calmer mood in ver. 2, and has apparently not been heard. He describes his unintermitted supplications by a strong metaphor. The word rendered "stretched out" is literally *poured out* as water, and is applied to weeping eyes (Lam. iii. 49). The Targum substitutes eye for hand here, but that is commentary, not translation. The clause which we render "without ceasing" is literally "and grew not stiff." That word, too, is used of tears, and derivatives from it are found in the passage just referred to in Lamentations ("intermission"), and in Lam. ii. 18 ("rest"). It carries on the metaphor of a stream, the flow of which is unchecked. The application of this metaphor to the hand is harsh, but the meaning is plain—that all night long the psalmist extended his hand in the attitude of prayer, as if open to receive God's gift. His voice "rose like a fountain night and day"; but brought no comfort to his soul; and he bewails himself, in the words which tell of Jacob's despair when he heard that Joseph was dead. *So* rooted and inconsolable does he think his sorrows. The thought of God has changed its nature, as if the sun were to become a source of darkness. When he looks up, he can only sigh; when he looks within, his spirit is clothed or veiled—*i.e.*, wrapped in melancholy.

In the next strophe of three verses (vv. 4–6) the

psalmist plunges yet deeper into gloom, and unfolds more clearly its occasion. Sorrow, like a beast of prey, devours at night; and every sad heart knows how eyelids, however wearied, refuse to close upon as wearied eyes, which gaze wide opened into the blackness and see dreadful things there. This man felt as if God's finger was pushing up his lids and forcing him to stare out into the night. Buffeted, as if laid on an anvil and battered with the shocks of doom, he cannot speak; he can only moan, as he is doing. Prayer seems to be impossible. But to say, "I cannot pray; would that I could!" is surely prayer, which will reach its destination, though the sender knows it not. The psalmist had found no ease in remembering God. He finds as little in remembering a brighter past. That he should have turned to history in seeking for consolation implies that his affliction was national in its sweep, however intensely personal in its pressure. This retrospective meditation on the great deeds of old is characteristic of the Asaph psalms. It ministers in them to many moods, as memory always does. In this psalm we have it feeding two directly opposite emotions. It may be the nurse of bitter Despair, or of bright-eyed Hope. When the thought of God occasions but sighs, the remembrance of His acts can only make the present more doleful. The heavy spirit finds reasons for heaviness in God's past and in its own. The psalmist in his sleepless vigils remembers other wakeful times, when his song filled the night with music and "awoke the dawn." Ver. 6 is parallel with ver. 3. The three key-words, *remember*, *muse*, *spirit*, recur. There, musing ended in wrapping the spirit in deeper gloom. Here, it stings that spirit to activity in questionings, which the next strophe flings out in vehement number and

startling plainness. It is better to be pricked to even such interrogations by affliction than to be made torpid by it. All depends on the temper in which they are asked. If that is right, answers which will scatter gloom are not far off.

The comparison of present national evils with former happiness naturally suggests such questions. Obviously, the casting off spoken of in ver. 7 is that of the nation, and hence its mention confirms the view that the psalmist is suffering under public calamities. All the questions mean substantially one thing—has God changed? They are not, as some questions are, the strongest mode of asserting their negative; nor are they, like others, a more than half assertion of their affirmative; but they are what they purport to be—the anxious interrogations of an afflicted man, who would fain be sure that God is the same as ever, but is staggered by the dismal contrast of Now and Then. He faces with trembling the terrible possibilities, and, however his language may seem to regard failure of resources or fickleness of purpose or limitations in long-suffering as conceivable in God, his doubts are better put into plain speech than lying diffused and darkening, like poisonous mists, in his heart. A thought, be it good or bad, can be dealt with when it is made articulate. Formulating vague conceptions is like cutting a channel in a bog for the water to run. One gets it together in manageable shape, and the soil is drained. So the end of the despondent half of the psalm is marked by the bringing to distinct speech of the suspicions which floated in the singer's mind and made him miserable. The Selah bids us dwell on the questions, so as to realise their gravity and prepare ourselves for their answer.

The second part begins in ver. 10 with an obscure and much-commented-on verse, of which two explanations are possible, depending mainly on the meanings of the two words "sickness" and "years." The former word may mean "my wounding" or "my sickness." The latter is by many commentators taken to be an infinitive verb, with the signification *to be changed*, and by others to be a plural noun meaning "*years*," as in ver. 6. Neglecting some minor differences, we may say that those who understand the word to mean *being changed* explain the whole thus: "This is my wound (misery, sorrow), that the right hand of the Most High has changed." So the old versions, and Hupfeld, Perowne, and Baethgen. But the use of the word in ver. 6 for "years" creates a strong presumption that its sense is the same here. As to the other word, its force is best seen by reference to a closely parallel passage in Jer. x. 19—"I said, Truly this is my grief (margin, *sickness*), and I must bear it"; where the word for *grief*, though not the same as in the psalm, is cognate. The most probable meaning, then, for the expression here is, "This my affliction is sent from God, and I must bear it with resignation." Then follows an elevating thought expressed in its simplest form like an exclamation, "*the years*," etc.—*i.e.*, "I will remember (comp. ver. 6) the time when the right hand of Jehovah had the pre-eminence" (Cheyne, *in loc.*). Delitzsch leaves the ellipsis unfilled, and takes the whole to mean that the psalmist says to himself that the affliction allotted will only last for the time which the mighty hand of God has determined. The rendering adopted above avoids the awkwardness of using the same word in two different senses in the same context, yields an appropriate meaning, especially in view of

the continual references to remembering, and begins the new strophe with a new note of hopefulness, whereas the other renderings prolong the minor key of the first part into the second. It is therefore to be preferred. The revolution in feeling is abrupt. All is sunny and bright in the last half. What makes the change? The recognition of two great truths: first, that the calamity is laid on Israel, and on the psalmist as a member of the nation, by God, and has not come because of that impossible change in Him which the bitter questions had suggested; and, second, the unchangeable eternity of God's delivering power. That second truth comes to him as with a flash, and the broken words of ver. 10*b* hail the sudden rising of the new star.

The remainder of the psalm holds fast by that thought of the great deeds of God in the past. It is a signal example of how the same facts remembered may depress or gladden, according to the point of view from which they are regarded. We can elect whether memory shall nourish despondency or gladness. Yet the alternative is not altogether a matter of choice; for the only people to whom "remembering happier things" need not be "a sorrow's crown of sorrow" are those who see God in the past, and so are sure that every joy that was and is not shall yet again be, in more thrilling and lasting form. If He shines out on us from the east that we have left behind, His brightness will paint the western sky towards which we travel. Beneath confidence in the perpetuity of past blessings lies confidence in the eternity of God. The "years of the right hand of the Most High" answer all questions as to His change of purpose or of disposition, and supply the only firm foundation for calm assurance of the

future. Memory supplies the colours with which Hope paints her truest pictures. "That which hath been is that which shall be" may be the utterance of the *blasé* man of the world, or of the devout man who trusts in the living God, and therefore knows that

> "There shall never be one lost good!
> What was shall live as before."

The strophe in vv. 13–15 fixes on the one great redeeming act of the Exodus as the pledge of future deeds of a like kind, as need requires. The language is deeply tinged with reminiscences of Exod. xv. "In holiness" (not "in the sanctuary"), the question "Who is so great a God?" the epithet "Who doest wonders," all come from Exod. xv. 11. "[Thine] arm" in the psalm recalls "By the greatness of Thine arm" in Exodus (ver. 16), and the psalmist's "redeemed Thy people" reproduces "the people which Thou hast redeemed" (Exod. xv. 13). The separate mention of "sons of Joseph" can scarcely be accounted for, if the psalm is prior to the division of the kingdoms. But the purpose of the designation is doubtful. It may express the psalmist's protest against the division as a breach of ancient national unity or his longings for reunion.

The final strophe differs from the others in structure. It contains five verses instead of three, and the verses are (with the exception of the last) composed of three clauses each instead of two. Some commentators have supposed that vv. 16–19 are an addition to the original psalm, and think that they do not cohere well with the preceding. This view denies that there is any allusion in the closing verses to the passage of the Red Sea, and takes the whole as simply a description of a

theophany, like that in Psalm xviii. But surely the writhing of the waters as if in pangs at the sight of God is such an allusion. Ver. 19, too, is best understood as referring to the path through the sea, whose waters returned and covered God's footprints from human eyes. Unless there is such a reference in vv. 16–19, the connection with the preceding and with ver. 20 is no doubt loose. But that is not so much a reason for denying the right of these verses to a place in the psalm as for recognising the reference. Why should a mere description of a theophany, which had nothing to do with the psalmist's theme, have been tacked on to it? No doubt, the thunders, lightnings, and storm so grandly described here are unmentioned in Exodus, and, quite possibly, may be simply poetic heightening of the scene, intended to suggest how majestic was the intervention which freed Israel. Some commentators, indeed, have claimed the picture as giving additional facts concerning the passage of the Red Sea. Dean Stanley, for example, has worked these points into his vivid description; but that carries literalism too far.

The picture in the psalm is most striking. The continuous short clauses crash and flash like the thunders and lightnings. That energetic metaphor of the waters writhing as if panic-struck is more violent than Western taste approves, but its emotional vigour as a rendering of the fact is unmistakable. "Thine arrows went to and fro" is a very imperfect transcript of the Hebrew, which suggests the swift zigzag of the fierce flashes. In ver. 18 the last word offers some difficulty. It literally means *a wheel*, and is apparently best rendered as above, the thunder being poetically conceived of as the sound of the rolling wheels of God's chariot. There are several coincidences between vv. 16–19 of the psalm

and Hab. iii. 10–15 : namely, the expression "writhed in pain," applied in Habakkuk to the mountains ; the word rendered "overflowing" (A.V.) or "tempest" (R.V.) in Hab. v. 10, cognate with the verb in ver. 17 of the psalm, and there rendered "poured out" ; the designation of lightnings as God's arrows. Delitzsch strongly maintains the priority of the psalm ; Hupfeld as strongly that of the prophet.

The last verse returns to the two-claused structure of the earlier part. It comes in lovely contrast with the majestic and terrible picture preceding, like the wonderful setting forth of the purpose of the other theophany in Psalm xviii., which was for no higher end than to draw one poor man from the mighty waters. All this pomp of Divine appearance, with lightnings, thunders, a heaving earth, a shrinking sea, had for its end the leading the people of God to their land, as a shepherd does his flock. The image is again an echo of Exod. xv. 13. The thing intended is not merely the passage of the Red Sea, but the whole process of guidance begun there amid the darkness. Such a close is too abrupt to please some commentators. But what more was needful or possible to be said, in a retrospect of God's past acts, for the solace of a dark present ? It was more than enough to scatter fears and flash radiance into the gloom which had wrapped the psalmist. He need search no further. He has found what he sought ; and so he hushes his song, and gazes in silence on the all-sufficient answer which memory has brought to all his questions and doubts. Nothing could more completely express the living, ever-present worth of the ancient deeds of God than the "abruptness" with which this psalm ceases rather than ends.

PSALM LXXVIII.

1 Give ear, my people, to my law,
Bow your ear to the sayings of my mouth.
2 I will open my mouth in a parable,
I will utter riddles from the ancient days,
3 What we have heard and known
And our fathers have told us,
4 We will not hide from their sons,
Recounting to the generation to come the praises of Jehovah,
And His might and the wonders that He has done.

5 For He established a testimony in Jacob,
And appointed a law in Israel,
Which He commanded our fathers
To make known to their children;
6 In order that the generation to come might know,
The children who should be born,
[Who] should rise up and tell to their children,
7 That they might place their confidence in God,
And not forget the deeds of God,
But keep His commandments;
8 And not be as their fathers,
A stubborn and rebellious generation,
A generation that did not make its heart steadfast,
And whose spirit was not faithful towards God.

9 The children of Ephraim, bearing [and] drawing bows,
Turned back in the day of onset.
10 They kept not the covenant of God,
And in His law they refused to walk,
11 And they forgot His doings,
And the wonders which He had showed them.
12 Before their fathers He did marvels,
In the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan.

13 He cleft the sea and let them pass through,
And He reared up the waters like a heap of corn
14 And He guided them in a cloud by day
And all night in a fiery light.
15 He cleft rocks in the wilderness,
And gave them drink abundantly, as [from] ocean depths.
16 And He brought forth streams from the cliff,
And made waters to flow down like rivers.

17 But they went on to sin yet more against Him,
To rebel against the Most High in the desert.
18 And they tempted God in their heart,
In asking meat after their desire.
19 And they spoke against God, they said,
"Is God able to spread a table in the wilderness?
20 Behold, He struck a rock, and waters gushed forth,
And torrents flowed out.
Is He able to give bread also?
Or will He prepare flesh for His people?"

21 Jehovah heard and was wroth,
And a fire was kindled in Jacob,
And wrath also went up against Israel.
22 For they did not believe in God,
And trusted not in His salvation.
23 And He commanded the clouds above,
And opened the doors of heaven,
24 And rained upon them manna to eat,
And gave them the corn of heaven.
25 Men did eat the bread of the Mighty Ones;
He sent them sustenance to the full.

26 He made the east wind go forth in the heavens,
And guided the south wind by His power;
27 And He rained flesh upon them like dust,
And winged fowls like the sand of the seas,
28 And let it fall in the midst of their camp,
Round about their habitations.
29 So they ate and were surfeited,
And their desires He brought to them.

30 They were not estranged from their desires
Their food was yet in their mouths.

31 And the wrath of God rose against them,
And slew the fattest of them,
And struck down the young men of Israel.
32 For all this they sinned yet more,
And believed not in His wonders.
33 So He made their days to vanish like a breath,
And their years in suddenness.

34 When He slew them, then they inquired after Him,
And returned and sought God earnestly.
35 And they remembered that God was their rock,
And God Most High their redeemer.
36 And they flattered Him with their mouth,
And with their tongue they lied to Him,
37 And their heart was not steadfast with Him,
And they were not faithful to His covenant.

38 But He is compassionate, covers iniquity, and destroys not;
Yea, many a time He takes back His anger,
And rouses not all His wrath.
39 So He remembered that they were [but] flesh,
A wind that goes and comes not again.

40 How often did they provoke Him in the wilderness,
Did they grieve Him in the desert!
41 Yea, again and again they tempted God,
And the Holy One of Israel they vexed.
42 They remembered not His hand,
The day when He set them free from the adversary
43 When He set forth His signs in Egypt,
And His wonders in the field of Zoan.
44 And He turned to blood their Nile streams,
And their streams they could not drink.

45 He sent amongst them flies that devoured them,
And frogs that destroyed them.
46 And He gave their increase to the caterpillar,
And their toil to the locust.
47 He killed their vines with hail,
And their sycamores with frost. [?]
48 And He gave their cattle up to the hail,
And their flocks to the lightnings.

49 He sent against them the heat of His anger,
Wrath and indignation and trouble,
A mission of angels of evil.
50 He levelled a path for His anger,
He spared not their souls from death,
But delivered over their life to the pestilence.
51 And He smote all the first-born of Egypt,
The firstlings of [their] strength in the tents of Ham.

52 And He made His people go forth like sheep,
And guided them like a flock in the desert.
53 And He led them safely, that they did not fear,
And the sea covered their enemies.
54 And He brought them to His holy border,
This mountain, which His right hand had won.
55 And He drove out the nations before them,
And allotted them by line as an inheritance,
And made the tribes of Israel to dwell in their tents.

56 But they tempted and provoked God Most High,
And His testimonies they did not keep.
57 And they turned back and were faithless like their fathers,
They were turned aside like a deceitful bow;
58 And they provoked Him to anger with their high places,
And with their graven images they moved Him to jealousy
59 God heard and was wroth,
And loathed Israel exceedingly.

60 So that He rejected the habitation of Shiloh,
The tent [which] He had pitched among men.
61 And He gave His strength to captivity,
And His beauty into the hand of the adversary.
62 And He delivered His people to the sword,
And against His inheritance He was wroth.
63 Their young men the fire devoured,
And their maidens were not praised in the marria
64 Their priests fell by the sword,
And their widows made no lamentation.

65 Then the Lord awoke as one that had slept,
Like a warrior shouting because of wine.
66 And He beat His adversaries back,
He put on them a perpetual reproach.

67 And He loathed the tent of Joseph,
And the tribe of Ephraim He did not choose.
68 But He chose the tribe of Judah,
Mount Zion, which He loved.

69 And He built His sanctuary like [heavenly] heights,
Like the earth which He has founded for ever.
70 And He chose David His servant,
And took him from the sheepfolds;
71 From following the ewes that give suck, He brought him
To feed Jacob His people,
And Israel His inheritance.
72 So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart,
And with the skilfulness of his hands he guided them.

THIS psalm is closely related to Psalms cv.–cvii. Like them, it treats the history of Israel, and especially the Exodus and wilderness wanderings, for purposes of edification, rebuke, and encouragement. The past is held up as a mirror to the present generation. It has been one long succession of miracles of mercy met by equally continuous ingratitude, which has ever been punished by national calamities. The psalm departs singularly from chronological order. It arranges its contents in two principal masses, each introduced by the same formula (vv. 12, 43) referring to "wonders in Egypt and the field of Zoan." But the first mass has nothing to do with Egypt, but begins with the passage of the Red Sea, and is wholly occupied with the wilderness. The second group of wonders begins in ver. 44 with the plagues of Egypt, touches lightly on the wilderness history, and then passes to the early history of Israel when settled in the land, and finishes with the establishment of David on the throne. It is difficult to account for this singular *bouleversement* of the history. But the conjecture may be hazarded that its reason lies in the better illustration

of continual interlacing of mercy and unthankfulness afforded by the events in the wilderness, than by the plagues of Egypt. That interlacing is the main point on which the psalmist wishes to lay stress, and therefore he begins with the most striking example of it. The use of the formula in ver. 12 looks as if his original intention had been to follow the order of time. Another peculiarity is the prominence given to Ephraim, both in ver. 9 as a type of faithlessness, and in ver. 67 as rejected in favour of Judah. These references naturally point to the date of the psalm as being subsequent to the separation of the kingdoms; but whether it is meant as rebuke to the northern kingdom, or as warning to Judah from the fate of Ephraim, is not clear. Nor are there materials for closer determination of date. The tone of the closing reference to David implies that his accession belongs to somewhat remote times.

There are no regular strophes, but a tendency to run into paragraphs of four verses, with occasional irregularities.

Vv. 1–4 declare the singer's didactic purpose. He deeply feels the solidarity of the nation through all generations—how fathers and children are knit by mystic ties, and by possession of an eternal treasure, the mighty deeds of God, of which they are bound to pass on the record from age to age. The history of ancient days is "a parable" and a "riddle" or "dark saying," as containing examples of great principles, and lessons which need reflection to discern and draw out. From that point of view, the psalmist will sum up the past. He is not a chronicler, but a religious teacher. His purpose is edification, rebuke, encouragement, the deepening of godly fear and obedience. In a word, he means to give the spirit of the nation's history.

Vv. 5–8 base this purpose on God's declared will that the knowledge of His deeds for Israel might be handed down from fathers to sons. The obligations of parents for the religious training of their children, the true bond of family unity, the ancient order of things when oral tradition was the principal means of preserving national history, the peculiarity of this nation's annals, as celebrating no heroes and recording only the deeds of God by men, the contrast between the changing bearers of the story and the undying deeds which they had to tell, are all expressed in these verses, so pathetic in their gaze upon the linked series of short-lived men, so stern in their final declaration that Divine commandment and mercy had been in vain, and that, instead of a tradition of goodness, there had been a transmission of stubbornness and departure from God, repeating itself with tragic uniformity. The devout poet, who knows what God meant family life to be and to do, sadly recognises the grim contrast presented by its reality. But yet he will make one more attempt to break the flow of evil from father to son. Perhaps his contemporaries will listen and shake themselves clear of this entail of disobedience.

The reference to Ephraim in vv. 9–11 is not to be taken as alluding to any cowardly retreat from actual battle. Ver. 9 seems to be a purely figurative way of expressing what is put without a metaphor in the two following verses. Ephraim's revolt from God's covenant was like the conduct of soldiers, well armed and refusing to charge the foe. The better their weapons, the greater the cowardice and ignominy of the recreants. So the faithlessness of Ephraim was made darker in criminality by its knowledge of God and experience of His mercy. These should have

knit the tribe to Him. A general truth of wide application is implied—that the measure of capacity is the measure of obligation. Guilt increases with endowment, if the latter is misused. A poor soldier, with no weapon but a sling or a stick, might sooner be excused for flight than a fully armed archer. The mention of Ephraim as prominent in faithlessness may be an allusion to the separation of the kingdoms. That allusion has been denied on the ground that it is the wilderness history which is here before the psalmist's mind. But the historical retrospect does not begin till ver. 12, and this introduction may well deal with an event later than those detailed in the following verses. Whether the revolt of the Ten Tribes is here in view or not, the psalmist sees that the wayward and powerful tribe of Ephraim had been a centre of religious disaffection, and there is no reason why his view should not be believed, or should be supposed to be due to mere prejudiced hostility.

The historical details begin with ver. 12, but, as has been noticed above, the psalmist seems to change his intention of first narrating the wonders in Egypt, and passes on to dilate on the wilderness history. "The field of Zoan" is the territory of the famous Egyptian city of Tzan, and seems equivalent to the Land of Goshen. The wonders enumerated are the familiar ones of the passage of the Red Sea, the guidance by the pillar of cloud and fire, and the miraculous supply of water from the rock. In vv. 15, 16, the poet brings together the two instances of such supply, which were separated from each other by the forty years of wandering, the first having occurred at Horeb in the first year, and the second at Kadesh in the last year. The two words "rocks," in ver. 15, and "cliff," in ver. 16, are

taken from the two narratives of these miracles, in Exod. xvii. and Numb. xx.

The group of four verses (13–16) sets forth God's mighty deeds; the next quartet of verses (17–20) tells of Israel's requital. It is significant of the thoughts which filled the singer's heart, that he begins the latter group with declaring that, notwithstanding such tokens of God's care, the people "went on to sin yet more," though he had specified no previous acts of sin. He combines widely separated instances of their murmurings, as he had combined distant instances of God's miraculous supply of water. The complaints which preceded the fall of the manna and the first supply of quails (Exod. xvi.), and those which led to the second giving of these (Numb. xi.) are thrown together, as one in kind. The speech put into the mouths of the murmurers in vv. 19, 20, is a poetic casting into bitter, blasphemous words of the half-conscious thoughts of the faithless, sensuous crowd. They are represented as almost upbraiding God with His miracle, as quite unmoved to trust by it, and as thinking that it has exhausted His power. When they were half dead with thirst, they thought much of the water, but now they depreciate that past wonder as a comparatively small thing. So, to the churlish heart, which cherishes eager desires after some unattained earthly good, past blessings diminish as they recede, and leave neither thankfulness nor trust. There is a dash of intense bitterness and ironical making light of their relation to God in their question, "Can He provide flesh for *His people*?" Much good that name has done us, starving here! The root of all this blasphemous talk was sensuous desire; and because the people yielded to it, they "tempted God"—that is, they "unbelievingly

and defiantly demanded, instead of trustfully waiting and praying" (Delitzsch). To ask food for their desires was sin; to ask it for their need would have been faith.

In ver. 21 the allusion is to the "fire of the Lord," which, according to Numb. xi. 3, burnt in the camp, just before the second giving of quails. It comes in here out of chronological order, for the sending of manna follows it; but the psalmist's didactic purpose renders him indifferent to chronology. The manna is called "corn of heaven" and "bread of the Mighty Ones"—*i.e.*, angels, as the LXX. renders the word. Both designations point to its heavenly origin, without its being necessary to suppose that the poet thought of angels as really eating it. The description of the fall of the quails (vv. 26–29) is touched with imaginative beauty. The word rendered above "made to go forth" is originally applied to the breaking up of an encampment, and that rendered "guided" to a shepherd's leading of his flock. Both words are found in the Pentateuch, the former in reference to the wind that brought the quails (Numb. xi. 31), the latter in reference to that which brought the plague of locusts (Exod. x. 13). So the winds are conceived of as God's servants, issuing from their tents at His command, and guided by Him as a shepherd leads his sheep. "He let it fall in the midst of their camp" graphically describes the dropping down of the wearied, storm-beaten birds.

Vv. 30–33 paint the swift punishment of the people's unbelief, in language almost identical with Numb. xi. 33. The psalmist twice stigmatises their sin as "lust," and uses the word which enters into the tragical name given to the scene of the sin and the punishment—Kibroth-Hat *taavah* (the graves of Lust). In vv. 32, 33,

the faint-hearted despondency after the return of the spies, and the punishment of it by the sentence of death on all that generation, seem to be alluded to.

The next group of four verses describes the people's superficial and transient repentance, "When He slew them they sought Him"—*i.e.*, when the fiery serpents were sent among them. But such seeking after God, which is properly not seeking Him at all, but only seeking to escape from evil, neither goes deep nor lasts long. Thus the end of it was only lip reverence, proved to be false by life, and soon ended. "Their heart was not steadfast." The pressure being removed, they returned to their habitual position, as all such penitents do.

From the midst of this sad narrative of faithlessness, springs up, like a fountain in a weary land, or a flower among half-cooled lava blocks, the lovely description of God's forbearance in vv. 38, 39. It must not be read as if it merely carried on the narrative, and was in continuation of the preceding clauses. The psalmist does not say "He *was* full of compassion," though that would be much, in the circumstances; but he is declaring God's eternal character. His compassions are unfailing. It is always His wont to cover sin and to spare. Therefore He exercised these gracious forbearances towards those obstinate transgressors. He was true to His own compassion in remembering their mortality and feebleness. What a melancholy sound, as of wind blowing among forgotten graves, has that summing up of human life as "a breath that goes and comes not again"!

With ver. 40 the second portion of the psalm may be regarded as beginning. The first group of historical details dealt first with God's mercies, and passed on

to man's requital. The second starts with man's ingratitude, which it paints in the darkest colours, as provoking Him, grieving Him, tempting Him, and vexing Him. The psalmist is not afraid to represent God as affected with such emotions by reason of men's indifference and unbelief. His language is not to be waved aside as anthropomorphic and antiquated. No doubt, we come nearer to the unattainable truth, when we conceive of God as grieved by men's sins and delighting in their trust, than when we think of Him as an impassive Infinitude, serenely indifferent to tortured or sinful hearts. For is not His name of names Love?

The psalmist traces Israel's sin to forgetfulness of God's mercy, and thus glides into a swift summing up of the plagues of Egypt, regarded as conducing to Israel's deliverance. They are not arranged chronologically, though the list begins with the first. Then follow three of those in which animals were the destroyers: namely, the fourth, that of flies; the second, that of frogs; and the eighth, that of locusts. Then comes the seventh, that of hail; and, according to some commentators, the fifth, that of the murrain, in ver. 49, followed by the tenth in ver. 51. But the grand, sombre imagery of ver. 49 is too majestic for such application. It rather sums up the whole series of plagues, likening them to an embassy (lit., a sending) of angels of evil. They are a grim company to come forth from His presence—Wrath, Indignation, and Trouble. The same power which sent them out on their errand prepared a way before them; and the crowning judgment, which, in the psalmist's view was also the crowning mercy, was the death of the first-born.

The next quartet of verses (vv. 52–55) passes lightly

over the wilderness history and the settlement in the land, and hastens on to a renewed narration of repeated rebellion, which occupies the next group (vv. 56–59). These verses cover the period from the entrance on Canaan to the fall of the sanctuary of Shiloh, during which there was a continual tendency to relapse into idolatry. That is the special sin here charged against the Israel of the time of the Judges. The figure of a "deceitful bow," in ver. 57, well describes the people as failing to fulfil the purpose of their choice by God. As such a weapon does not shoot true, and makes the arrow fly wide, however well aimed and strongly drawn, so Israel foiled all Divine attempts, and failed to carry God's message to the world, or to fulfil His will in themselves. Hence the next verses tell, with intense energy and pathos, the sad story of Israel's humiliation under the Philistines. The language is extraordinarily strong in its description of God's loathing and rejection of the nation and sanctuary, and is instinct with sorrow, blended with stern recognition of His righteousness in judgment. What a tragic picture the psalmist draws! Shiloh, the dwelling-place of God, empty for evermore; the "Glory"—that is, the Ark—in the enemy's hands; everywhere stiffening corpses; a pall of silence over the land; no brides and no joyous bridal chaunts; the very priests massacred, unlamented by their widows, who had wept so many tears already that the fountain of them was dried up, and even sorrowing love was dumb with horror and despair!

The two last groups of verses paint God's great mercy in delivering the nation from such misery. The daring figure of His awaking as from sleep and dashing upon Israel's foes, who are also His, with a shout like

that of a hero stimulated by wine, is more accordant with Eastern fervour than with our colder imagination; but it wonderfully expresses the sudden transition from a period, during which God seemed passive and careless of His people's wretchedness, to one in which His power flashed forth triumphant for their defence. The prose fact is the long series of victories over the Philistines and other oppressors, which culminated in the restoration of the Ark, the selection of Zion as its abode, which involved the rejection of Shiloh and consequently of Ephraim (in whose territory Shiloh was), and the accession of David. The Davidic kingdom is, in the psalmist's view, the final form of Israel's national existence; and the sanctuary, like the kingdom, is perpetual as the lofty heavens or the firm earth. Nor were his visions vain, for that kingdom subsists and will subsist for ever, and the true sanctuary, the dwelling-place of God among men, is still more closely intertwined with the kingdom and its King than the psalmist knew. The perpetual duration of both is, in truth, the greatest of God's mercies, outshining all earlier deliverances; and they who truly have become the subjects of the Christ, the King of Israel and of the world, and who dwell with God in His house, by dwelling with Jesus, will not rebel against Him any more, nor ever forget His wonders, but faithfully tell them to the generations to come.

PSALM LXXIX.

1 O God, [the] heathen have come into Thine inheritance,
They have profaned Thy holy Temple,
They have made Jerusalem heaps of stones.
2 They have given the corpses of Thy servants [as] meat to the fowls of the heavens,
The flesh of Thy favoured Ones to the beasts of the earth.
3 They have poured out their blood like water round Jerusalem,
And there was none to bury [them].
4 We have become a reproach to our neighbours,
A scoff and a scorn to those round us.

5 How long, Jehovah, wilt Thou be angry for ever?
[How long] shall Thy jealousy burn like fire?
6 Pour out Thy wrath upon the heathen who know Thee not,
And upon [the] kingdoms which call not upon Thy name.
7 For they have eaten up Jacob,
And his pasture have they laid waste.
8 Remember not against us the iniquities of those before us,
Speedily let Thy compassions [come to] meet us,
For we are brought very low.

9 Help us, O God, for the sake of the glory of Thy name,
And deliver us, and cover over our sins for the sake of Thy name.
10 Why should the heathen say, Where is their God?
Let there be known among the heathen before our eyes
The revenging of the blood of Thy servants which is poured out.
11 Let there come before Thee the groaning of the captive,
According to the greatness of Thine arm preserve the sons of death.
12 And return to our neighbours sevenfold into their bosom
Their reproach [with] which they have reproached Thee, O Lord.

13 And we, we the people and the flock of Thy pasture,
Will thank Thee for ever;
To generation after generation will we recount Thy praise

THE same national agony which was the theme of Psalm lxxiv. forced the sad strains of this psalm from the singer's heart. There, the profanation of the Temple, and here, the destruction of the city, are the more prominent. There, the dishonour to God; here, the distresses of His people, are set forth. Consequently, confession of sin is more appropriate here, and prayers for pardon blend with those for deliverance. But the tone of both psalms is the same, and there are similarities of expression which favour, though they do not demand, the hypothesis that the author is the same. Such similarities are the "how long" (lxxiv. 10 and lxxix. 5); the desecration of the Temple (lxxiv. 3, 7, and lxxix. 1) the giving over to wild beasts (lxxiv. 19, and lxxix. 2); the reproach of God (lxxiv. 10, 18, 22, and lxxix. 12). The comparison of Israel to a flock is found in both psalms, but in others of the Asaph group also.

The same remarks which were made as to the date of the former psalm apply in this case. Two arguments have, however, been urged against the Maccabean date. The first is that drawn from the occurrence of vv. 6, 7, in Jer. x. 25. It is contended that Jeremiah is in the habit of borrowing from earlier writers, that the verse immediately preceding that in question is quoted from Psalm vi. 1, and that the connection of the passage in the psalm is closer than in the prophet, and, therefore, that the words are presumably *in situ* here, as also that the verbal alterations are such as to suggest that the prophet rather than the psalmist is the adapter. But, on the other hand, Hupfeld maintains that the connection in Jeremiah is the closer. Not much weight can be attached to that point, for neither prophet nor poet can be tied down to cool

concatenation of sentences. Delitzsch claims the verbal alterations as indubitable proofs of the priority of the prophet, and maintains that "the borrower betrays himself" by changing the prophet's words into less accurate and elegant ones, and by omissions which impair "the soaring fulness of Jeremiah's expressions." The critics who hold that the psalm refers to the Chaldean invasion, and that Jeremiah has borrowed from it, have to face a formidable difficulty. The psalm must have been written after the catastrophe: the prophecy preceded it. How then can the prophet be quoting the psalm? The question has not been satisfactorily answered, nor is it likely to be.

A second argument against the Maccabean date is based upon the quotation of ver. 3 in 1 Macc. vii. 16, which it introduces by the usual formula of quotation from Scripture. It is urged that a composition so recent as the psalm would be, if of Maccabean date, would not be likely to be thus referred to. But this argument confuses the date of occurrence recorded in 1 Maccabees with the date of the record; and there is no improbability in the writer of the book quoting as Scripture a psalm which had sprung from the midst of the tragedy which he narrates.

The strophical division is not perfectly clear, but it is probably best to recognise three strophes of four verses each, with an appended verse of conclusion. The first spreads before God His people's miseries. The second and third are prayer for deliverance and confession of sin; but they differ, in that the former strophe dwells mainly upon the wished-for destruction of the enemy, and the latter upon the rescue of Israel, while a subordinate diversity is that ancestral sins are confessed in the one, and those of the present genera-

tion in the other. Ver. 13 stands out of the strophe scheme as a kind of epilogue.

The first strophe vividly describes the ghastly sights that wrung the psalmist's heart, and will, as he trusts, move God's to pity and help. The same thought as was expressed in Psalm lxxiv. underlies the emphatic repetition of "Thy" in this strophe—namely, the implication of God's fair name in His people's disasters. "*Thine* inheritance" is invaded, and "*Thy* holy Temple" defiled by the "heathen." The corpses of "*Thy* servants" lie unburied, torn by vultures' beaks and jackals' claws. The blood of "*Thy* favoured Ones" saturates the ground. It was not easy to hold fast by the reality of God's special relation to a nation thus apparently deserted, but the psalmist's faith stood even such a strain, and is not dashed by a trace of doubt. Such times are the test and triumph of trust. If genuine, it will show brightest against the blackest background. The word in ver. 1 rendered "heathen" is usually translated "nations," but here evidently connotes idolatry (ver. 6). Their worship of strange gods, rather than their alien nationality, makes their invasion of God's inheritance a tragic anomaly. The psalmist remembers the prophecy of Micah (iii. 12) that Jerusalem should become heaps, and sadly repeats it as fulfilled at last. As already noticed, ver. 3 is quoted in 1 Macc. vii. 16, 17, and ver. 4 is found in Psalm xliv. 13, which is by many commentators referred to the Maccabean period.

The second strophe passes to direct petition, which, as it were, gives voice to the stiffened corpses strewing the streets, and the righteous blood crying from the ground. The psalmist goes straight to the cause of calamity—the anger of God—and, in the close of the

strophe, confesses the sins which had kindled it. Beneath the play of politics and the madness of Antiochus, he discerned God's hand at work. He reiterates the fundamental lesson, which prophets were never weary of teaching, that national disasters are caused by the anger of God, which is excited by national sins. That conviction is the first element in his petitions. A second is the twin conviction that the "heathen" are used by God as His instrument of chastisement, but that, when they have done their work, they are called to account for the human passion—cruelty, lust of conquest, and the like—which impelled them to it. Even as they poured out the blood of God's people, they have God's wrath poured out on them, because "they have eaten up Jacob."

The same double point of view is frequently taken by the prophets: for example, in Isaiah's magnificent prophecy against "the Assyrian" (x. 5 *seq.*), where the conqueror is first addressed as "the rod of Mine anger," and then his "punishment" is foretold, because, while executing God's purpose, he had been unconscious of his mission, and had been gratifying his ambition. These two convictions go very deep into "the philosophy of history." Though modified in their application to modern states and politics, they are true in substance still. The Goths who swept down on Rome, the Arabs who crushed a corrupt Christianity, the French who stormed across Europe, were God's scavengers, gathered vulture-like round carrion, but they were each responsible for their cruelty, and were punished "for the fruit of their stout hearts."

The closing verse of the strophe (ver. 8) is intimately connected with the next, which we take as beginning the third strophe; but this connection does not set

aside the strophical division, though it somewhat obscures it. The distinction between the similar petitions of vv. 8, 9, is sufficient to warrant our recognition of that division, even whilst acknowledging that the two parts coalesce more closely than usual. The psalmist knows that the heathen have been hurled against Israel because God is angry; and he knows that God's anger is no arbitrarily kindled flame, but one lit and fed by Israel's sins. He knows, too, that there is a fatal entail by which the iniquities of the fathers are visited on the children. Therefore, he asks first that these ancestral sins may not be "remembered," nor their consequences discharged on the children's heads. "The evil that men do lives after them," and history affords abundant instances of the accumulated consequences of ancestors' crimes lighting on descendants that had abandoned the ancient evil, and were possibly doing their best to redress it. Guilt is not transmitted, but results of wrong are; and it is one of the tragedies of history that "one soweth and another reapeth" the bitter fruit. Upon one generation may, and often does, come the blood of all the righteous men that many generations have slain (Matt. xxiii. 35).

The last strophe (vv. 9–12) continues the strain begun in ver. 8, but with significant deepening into confession of the sins of the existing generation. The psalmist knows that the present disaster is no case of the fathers having eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth being set on edge, but that he and his contemporaries had repeated the fathers' trangressions. The ground of his plea for cleansing and deliverance is the glory of God's name, which he emphatically puts at the end of both clauses of ver. 9. He repeats the same thought in another form in the question of ver. 10,

"Why should the heathen say, Where is their God?" If Israel, sinful though it is, and therefore meriting chastisement, is destroyed, there will be a blot on God's name, and the "heathen" will take it as proof, not that Israel's God was just, but that He was too feeble or too far off to hear prayers or to send succours. It is bold faith which blends acknowledgment of sins with such a conviction of the inextricable intertwining of God's glory and the sinners' deliverance. Lowly confession is wonderfully wedded to confidence that seems almost too lofty. But the confidence is in its inmost core as lowly as the confession, for it disclaims all right to God's help, and clasps His name as its only but sufficient plea.

The final strophe dwells more on the sufferings of the survivors than the earlier parts of the psalm do, and in this respect contrasts with Psalm lxxiv., which is all but entirely silent as to these. Not only does the spilt blood of dead confessors cry for vengeance, since they died for their faith, as "Thy servants," but the groans and sighs of the living who are captives, and "sons of death"—*i.e.*, doomed to die, if unrescued by God—appeal to Him. The expressions "the groaning of the captive" and "the sons of death" occur in Psalm cii. 20, from which, if this is a composition of Maccabean date, they are here quoted. The strophe ends with recurring to the central thought of both this and the companion psalm—the reproach on God from His servants' calamities—and prays that the enemies' taunts may be paid back into their bosoms sevenfold—*i.e.*, in fullest measure.

The epilogue in ver. 13 has the image of a flock, so frequent in the Asaph psalms, suggesting tender thoughts of the shepherd's care and of his obliga-

tions. Deliverance will evoke praise, and, instead of the sad succession of sin and suffering from generation to generation, the solidarity of the nation will be more happily expressed by ringing songs, transmitted from father to son, and gathering volume as they flow from age to age.

PSALM LXXX.

1 **Shepherd of Israel, give ear,**
Thou who leddest Joseph like a flock,
Thou that sittest [throned upon] the cherubim, shine forth.
2 Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh stir up Thy strength,
And come for salvation for us.
3 O God, restore us,
And cause Thy face to shine, and we shall be saved.

4 Jehovah, God [of] Hosts,
How long wilt Thou be angry against the prayer of **Thy people?**
5 Thou hast made them eat tears [as] bread,
And hast given them to drink [of] tears in large measure.
6 Thou makest us a strife to our neighbours,
And our enemies mock to their hearts' content.
7 God [of] Hosts, restore us,
And cause Thy face to shine, and we shall be saved.

8 A vine out of Egypt didst Thou transplant,
Thou didst drive out the nations and plant it.
9 Thou didst clear a place before it,
And it threw out its roots and filled the land.
10 The mountains were covered with its shadow,
And its branches [were like] the cedars of God.
11 It spread its boughs [even] unto the sea,
And to the River its shoots.

12 Why hast Thou broken down its fences,
So that all who pass on the way pluck from it?
13 The boar of the wood roots it up,
And the beasts of the field feed on it.
14 God [of] Hosts, turn, we beseech Thee,
Look from heaven and see,
And visit this vine.

15 And protect what Thy right hand has planted,
And the son whom Thou madest strong for Thyself.
16 Burned with fire is it—cut down;
At the rebuke of Thy countenance they perish.
17 Let Thy hand be upon the man of Thy right hand,
Upon the son of man [whom] Thou madest strong for Thyself.
18 And we will not go back from Thee;
Revive us, and we will invoke Thy name.
19 Jehovah, God [of] Hosts, restore us,
And cause Thy face to shine, and we shall be saved.

THIS psalm is a monument of some time of great national calamity; but its allusions do not enable us to reach certainty as to what that calamity was. Two striking features of it have been used as clues to its occasion—namely, the designation of the nation as "Joseph," and the mention of the three tribes in ver. 2. Calvin, Delitzsch, Hengstenberg, and others are led thereby to regard it as a prayer by an inhabitant of Judah for the captive children of the northern kingdom; while others, as Cheyne, consider that only the Persian period explains the usage in question. The name of "Joseph" is applied to the whole nation in other Asaph psalms (lxxvii. 15; lxxxi. 5). It is tempting to suppose, with Hupfeld, that this nomenclature indicates that the ancient antagonism of the kingdoms has passed away with the captivity of the Ten Tribes, and that the psalmist, a singer in Judah, looks wistfully to the ideal unity, yearns to see breaches healed, and the old associations of happier days, when "Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh" encamped side by side in the desert, and marched one after the other, renewed in a restored Israel. If this explanation of the mention of the tribes is adopted, the psalm falls in some period after the destruction of the northern kingdom, but prior to that of Judah The prayer in the refrain "turn us" might,

indeed, mean "bring us back from exile," but may as accurately be regarded as asking for restored prosperity —an explanation which accords better with the rest of the psalm. We take the whole, then, as a prayer for the nation, conceived of in its original, long-broken unity. It looks back to the Divine purpose as expressed in ancient deeds of deliverance, and prays that it may be fulfilled, notwithstanding apparent thwarting. Closer definition of date is unattainable.

The triple refrain in vv. 3, 7, 19, divides the psalm into three unequal parts. The last of these is disproportionately long, and may be further broken up into three parts, of which the first (vv. 8–11) describes the luxuriant growth of Israel under the parable of a vine, the second (vv. 12–14) brings to view the bitter contrast of present ruin, and, with an imperfect echo of the refrain, melts into the petitioning tone of the third (vv. 15–19), which is all prayer.

In the first strophe "Shepherd of Israel" reminds us of Jacob's blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh, in which he invoked "the God who shepherded me all my life long" to "bless the lads," and of the title in Gen. xlix. 24, "the shepherd, the stone of Israel." The comparison of the nation to a flock is characteristic of the Asaph psalms, and here refers to the guidance of the people at the Exodus. Delitzsch regards the notions of the earthly and heavenly sanctuary as being blended in the designation of God as sitting throned on the cherubim, but it is better to take the reference as being to His dwelling in the Temple. The word rendered "shine forth" occurs in Psalm l. 2, where it expresses His coming from "Zion," and so it does here. The same metaphor underlies the subsequent petition in ver. 3. In both God is thought of as light, and the

manifestation of His delivering help is likened to the blazing out of the sun from behind a cloud.

In reference to the mention of the tribes in ver. 2, we need only add to what has been already said, that the petitions of ver. 1, which look back to the wilderness marches, when the Ark led the van, naturally suggested the mention of the three tribes who were together reckoned as "the camp of Ephraim," and who, in the removal of the encampment, "set forth third"—that is, immediately in the rear of the tabernacle. The order of march explains not only the collocation here, but the use of the word "Before." Joseph and Benjamin were children of the same mother, and the schism which parted their descendants is, to the psalmist's faith, as transient as unnatural. Once again shall the old unity be seen, when the brothers' sons shall again dwell and fight side by side, and God shall again go forth before them for victory.

The prayer of the refrain, "turn us," is not to be taken as for restoration from exile, which is negatived by the whole tone of the psalm, nor as for spiritual quickening, but simply asks for the return of the glories of ancient days. The petition that God would let His face shine upon the nation alludes to the priestly benediction (Numb. vi. 25), thus again carrying us back to the wilderness. Such a flashing forth is all that is needed to change blackest night into day. To be "saved" means here to be rescued from the assaults of hostile nations. The poet was sure that Israel's sole defence was God, and that one gleam of His face would shrivel up the strongest foes, like unclean, slimy creatures which writhe and die in sunshine. The same conviction is valid in a higher sphere. Whatever elevation of meaning is given to

"saved," the condition of it is always this—the manifestation of God's face. That brings light into all dark hearts. To behold that light, and to walk in it, and to be transformed by beholding, as they are who lovingly and steadfastly gaze, is salvation.

A piteous tale of suffering is wailed forth in the second strophe. The peculiar accumulation of the Divine names in vv. 4, 19, is found also in Psalms lix. 5 and lxxxiv. 8. It is grammatically anomalous, as the word for God (Elohim) does not undergo the modification which would show that the next word is to be connected with it by "of." Hence, some have regarded "Ts'bhaoth" (hosts) as being almost equivalent to a proper name of God, which it afterwards undoubtedly became; while others have explained the construction by supposing the phrase to be elliptical, requiring after "God" the supplement "God of." This accumulation of Divine names is by some taken as a sign of late date. Is it not a mark of the psalmist's intensity rather than of his period? In accordance with the Elohistic character of the Asaph psalms, the common expression "Jehovah of Hosts" is expanded; but the hypothesis that the expansion was the work of a redactor is unnecessary. It may quite as well have been that of the author.

The urgent question "How long?" is not petulant impatience, but hope deferred, and, though sick at heart, still cleaving to God and remonstrating for long-protracted calamities. The bold imagery of ver. 4 *b* cannot well be reproduced in translation. The rendering "wilt Thou be angry?" is but a feeble reproduction of the vigorous original, which runs "wilt Thou smoke?" Other psalms (*e.g.*, lxxiv. 1) speak of God's anger as smoking, but here the figure is applied to

God Himself. What a contrast it presents to the petition in the refrain! That "light" of Israel has become "as a flaming fire." A terrible possibility of darkening and consuming wrath lies in the Divine nature, and the very emblem of light suggests it. It is questionable whether the following words should be rendered "against the prayer of Thy people," or "while Thy people are praying" (Delitzsch). The former meaning is in accordance with the Hebrew, with other Scripture passages, and with the tone of the psalm, and is to be preferred, as more forcibly putting the anomaly of an unanswering God. Ver. 5 presents the national sorrows under familiar figures. The people's food and drink were tears. The words of *a* may either be rendered "bread of tears"—*i.e.*, eaten with, or rather consisting of, tears; or, as above, "tears [as] bread." The word rendered "in large measure" means "the third part"—"of some larger measure." It is found only in Isa. xl. 12. "The third part of an ephah is a puny measure for the dust of the earth, [but] it is a large measure for tears" (Delitzsch, *in loc.*). Ver. 6 adds one more touch to the picture—gleeful neighbours cynically rejoicing to their hearts' content (lit., for themselves) over Israel's calamities. Thus, in three verses, the psalmist points to an angry God, a weeping nation, and mocking foes, a trilogy of woe. On all he bases an urgent repetition of the refrain, which is made more imploring by the expanded name under which God is invoked to help. Instead of the simple "God," as in ver. 3, he now says "God of Hosts." As sense of need increases, a true suppliant goes deeper into God's revealed character.

From ver. 8 onwards the parable of the vine as representing Israel fills the singer's mind. As has

been already noticed, this part of the psalm may be regarded as one long strophe, the parts of which follow in orderly sequence, and are held closely together, as shown by the recurrence of the refrain at the close only. Three stages are discernible in it—a picture of what has been, the contrast of what is now, and a prayer for speedy help. The emblem of the vine, which has received so great development in the prophets, and has been hallowed for ever by our Lord's use of it, seems to have been suggested to the psalmist by the history of Joseph, to which he has already alluded. For, in Jacob's blessing (Gen. xlix. 22 *seqq.*), Joseph is likened to a fruitful bough. Other Old Testament writers have drawn out the manifold felicities of the emblem as applied to Israel. But these need not concern us here, where the point is rather God's husbandry and the vine's growth, both of which are in startling contrast with a doleful present. The figure is carried out with much beauty in detail. The Exodus was the vine's transplanting; the destruction of the Canaanites was the grubbing up of weeds to clear the ground for it; the numerical increase of the people was its making roots and spreading far. In ver. 10*b* the rendering may be either that adopted above, or "And the cedars of God [were covered with] its branches." The latter preserves the parallelism of clauses and the unity of representation in vv. 10, 11, which will then deal throughout with the spreading growth of the vine. But the cedars would not have been called "of God,"—which implies their great size, —unless their dimensions had been in point, which would not be the case if they were only thought of as espaliers for the vine. And the image of its running over the great trees of Lebanon is unnatural. The

rendering as above is to be preferred, even though it somewhat mars the unity of the picture. The extent of ground covered by the vine is described, in ver. 11, as stretching from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates (Deut. xi. 24; 1 Kings iv. 24). Such had been the glories of the past; and they had all been the work of God's hand.

In ver. 12 the miserable contrast of present desolation is spread before God, with the bold and yet submissive question "Why?" The vineyard wall is thrown down, and the vine lies exposed to every vagrant passenger, and to every destructive creature. Swine from the woods burrow at its roots, and "whatever moves on the plain" (Psalm l. 11, the only other place where the expression occurs) feeds on it. The parallelism forbids the supposition that any particular enemy is meant by the wild boar. Hupfeld would transpose ver. 16 so as to stand after ver. 13, which he thinks improves the connection, and brings the last part of the psalm into symmetrical form, in three equal parts, containing four verses each. Cheyne would put vv. 14, 15, before vv. 12, 13, and thereby secures more coherence and sequence. But accuracy in these matters is not to be looked for in such highly emotional poetry, and perhaps a sympathetic ear may catch in the broken words a truer ring than in the more orderly arrangement of them by critics.

Ver. 14 sounds like an imperfect echo of the refrain significantly modified, so as to beseech that God would "turn" Himself, even as He had been implored to "turn" His people. The purpose of His turning is that He may "look and see" the condition of the desolated vineyard, and thence be moved to interfere for its restoration. The verse may be regarded as

closing one of the imperfectly developed strophes of this last part; but it belongs in substance to the following petitions, though in form it is more closely connected with the preceding verses. The picture of Israel's misery passes insensibly into prayer, and the burden of that prayer is, first, that God would behold the sad facts, as the preliminary to His acting in view of them.

The last part (vv. 15–19) is prayer for God's help, into which forces itself one verse (16), recurring to the miseries of the nation. It bursts in like an outcrop of lava, revealing underground disturbance and fires. Surely that interruption is more pathetic and natural than is the result obtained by the suggested transpositions. The meaning of the word in ver. 15 rendered above "protect" is doubtful, and many commentators would translate it as a noun, and regard it as meaning "plant," or, as the A.V., "vineyard." The verse would then depend on the preceding verb in ver. 14, "visit." But this construction is opposed by the copula (*and*) preceding, and it is best to render "protect," with a slight change in the vocalisation. There may be an allusion to Jacob's blessing in ver. 15 *b*, for in it (Gen. xlix. 22) Joseph is called a "fruitful bough"—lit., "son." If so, the figure of the vine is retained in ver. 15 *b* as well as in *a*.

The apparent interruption of the petitions by ver. 16 is accounted for by the sharp pang that shot into the psalmist's heart, when he recalled, in his immediately preceding words, the past Divine acts, which seemed so contradicted now. But the bitterness, though it surges up, is overcome, and his petitions return to their former strain in ver. 17, which pathetically takes up, as it were, the broken thread, by repeating "right

hand" from ver. 15 *a*, and "whom Thou madest strong for Thyself" from ver. 15 *b*. Israel, not an individual, is the "man of Thy right hand," in which designation, coupled with "son," there may be an allusion to the name of Benjamin (ver. 2), the "son of the right hand." Human weakness and Divine strength clothing it are indicated in that designation for Israel "the son of man whom Thou madest strong for Thyself." The inmost purpose of God's gifts is that their recipients may be "the secretaries of His praise." Israel's sacred calling, its own weakness, and the strength of the God who endows it are all set forth, not now as lessons to it, but as pleas with Him, whose gifts are without repentance, and whose purposes cannot be foiled by man's unworthiness or opposition.

The psalm closes with a vow of grateful adhesion to God as the result of His renewed mercy. They who have learned how bitter a thing it is to turn away from God, and how blessed when He turns again to them, and turns back their miseries and their sins, have good reason for not again departing from Him. But if they are wise to remember their own weakness, they will not only humbly vow future faithfulness, but earnestly implore continual help; since only the constant communication of a Divine quickening will open their lips to call upon God's name.

The refrain in its most expanded form closes the psalm. Growing intensity of desire and of realisation of the pleas and pledges hived in the name are expressed by its successive forms,—God; God of Hosts; Jehovah, God of Hosts. The faith that grasps all that is contained in that full-toned name already feels the light of God's face shining upon it, and is sure that its prayer for salvation is not in vain.

PSALM LXXXI.

1 Shout for joy to God our strength,
Shout aloud to the God of Jacob.
2 Lift up the song, and sound the timbrel,
The pleasant lyre with the harp.
3 Blow the trumpet on the new moon,
On the full moon, for the day of our feast.
4 For this is a statute for Israel,
An ordinance of the God of Jacob.
5 For a testimony in Joseph He appointed it,
When He went forth over the land of Egypt.
—A language which I know not I hear.

6 I removed his shoulder from the burden,
His hands were freed from the basket.
7 In straits thou didst call and I delivered thee,
I answered thee in the secret place of thunder,
I proved thee at the waters of Meribah. Selah.
8 Hear, My people, and I will witness to thee;
O Israel, would that thou wouldest hearken to Me!
9 There shall be no strange god in thee,
And thou shalt not bow down to an alien god.
10 I, I am Jehovah thy God,
Who brought thee up from the land of Egypt.
Open wide thy mouth, and I will fill it.

11 But My people hearkened not to My voice,
And Israel did not yield to Me.
12 Then I let them go in the stubbornness of their heart,
That they might walk in their own counsels.

13 Would that My people would hearken to Me,
That Israel would walk in My ways!
14 Easily would I humble their enemies,
And against their adversaries turn My hand.

15 The haters of Jehovah would come feigning to Him,
But their time should endure for ever.
16 And He would feed thee with the fat of wheat,
And with honey from the rock would I satisfy thee.

THE psalmist summons priests and people to a solemn festival, commemorative of Israel's deliverance from Egypt, and sets forth the lessons which that deliverance teaches, the learning of which is the true way of keeping the feast. There has been much discussion as to which feast is in the psalmist's mind. That of Tabernacles has been widely accepted as intended, chiefly on the ground that the first day of the month in which it occurred was celebrated by the blowing of trumpets, as the beginning of the civil year. This practice is supposed to account for the language of ver. 3, which seems to imply trumpet-blowing both at new and full moon. But, on other grounds, the Passover is more likely to be intended, as the psalm deals with the manifestations of Divine power attending the beginning of the Exodus, which followed the first Passover, as well as with those during the desert sojourn, which alone were commemorated by the feast of Tabernacles. True, we have no independent knowledge of any trumpet-blowing on the first day of the Passover month (Nisan); but Delitzsch and others suggest that from this psalm it may be inferred "that the commencement of each month, and more especially the commencement of the month (Nisan), which was at the same time the commencement of the ecclesiastical year, was signalised by the blowing of horns." On the whole, the Passover is most probably the feast in question.

Olshausen, followed by Cheyne, regards the psalm as made up of two fragments (vv. 1–5 *a*, and 5 *c*–16).

But surely the exhortations and promises of the latter portion are most relevant to the summons to the festival contained in the former part, and there could be no more natural way of preparing for the right commemoration of the deliverance than to draw out its lessons of obedience and to warn against departure from the delivering God. Definiteness as to date is unattainable. The presupposed existence of the full Temple ceremonial shows that the psalm was not written in exile, nor at a time of religious persecution. Its warning against idolatry would be needless in a post-exilic psalm, as no tendency thereto existed after the return from captivity. But beyond such general indications we cannot go. The theory that the psalm is composed of two fragments exaggerates the difference between the two parts into which it falls. These are the summons to the feast (vv. 1–5), and the lessons of the feast (vv. 6–16).

Delitzsch suggests that the summons in ver. 1 is addressed to the whole congregation; that in ver. 2 to the Levites, the appointed singers and musicians; and that in ver. 3 to the priests who are intrusted with blowing the Shophar, or horn (Josh. vi. 4, and 2 Chron. xx. 28). One can almost hear the tumult of joyful sounds, in which the roar of the multitude, the high-pitched notes of singers, the deeper clash of timbrels, the twanging of stringed instruments, and the hoarse blare of rams' horns, mingle in concordant discord, grateful to Eastern ears, however unmusical to ours. The religion of Israel allowed and required exuberant joy. It sternly rejected painting and sculpture, but abundantly employed music, the most ethereal of the arts, which stirs emotions and longings too delicate and deep for speech. Whatever

differences in form have necessarily attended the progress from the worship of the Temple to that of the Church, the free play of joyful emotion should mark the latter even more than the former. Decorum is good, but not if purchased by the loss of ringing gladness. The psalmist's summons has a meaning still.

The reason for it is given in vv. 4, 5 *a*. It—*i.e.*, the feast (not the musical accompaniments)—is appointed by God. The psalmist employs designations for it, which are usually applied to "the word of the Lord"; statute, ordinance, testimony, being all found in Psalms xix., cxix., with that meaning. A triple designation of the people corresponds with these triple names for the feast. *Israel*, *Jacob*, and *Joseph* are synonyms, the use of the last of these having probably the same force here as in the preceding psalm—namely, to express the singer's longing for the restoration of the shattered unity of the nation. The summons to the feast is based, not only on Divine appointment, but also on Divine purpose in that appointment. It was "a testimony," a rite commemorative of a historical fact, and therefore an evidence of it to future times. There is no better proof of such a fact than a celebration of it, which originates contemporaneously and continues through generations. The feast in question was thus simultaneous with the event commemorated, as ver. 5 *b* tells. It was God, not Israel, as is often erroneously supposed, who "went forth." For the following preposition is not "from," which might refer to the national departure, but "over" or "against," which cannot have such a reference, since Israel did not, in any sense, go "over" or "against" the land. God s triumphant forth-putting of power over the whole

land, especially in the death of the first-born, on the night of the Passover, is meant to be remembered for ever, and is at once the fact commemorated by the feast, and a reason for obeying His appointment of it.

So far the thoughts and language are limpid, but ver. 5 *c* interrupts their clear flow. Who is the speaker thus suddenly introduced? What is the "language" (lit., lip) which he "knew not"? The explanation implied by the A.V. and R.V., that the collective Israel speaks, and that the reference is, as in Psalm cxiv. 1, to the "strange language" of the Egyptians, is given by most of the older authorities, and by Ewald and Hengstenberg, but has against it the necessity for the supplement "where," and the difficulty of referring the "I" to the nation. The more usual explanation in modern times is that the speaker is the psalmist, and that the language which he hears is the voice of God, the substance of which follows in the remainder of the psalm. As in Job iv. 16 Eliphaz could not discern the appearance of the mysterious form that stood before his eyes, and thus its supernatural character is suggested, so the psalmist hears an utterance of a hitherto unknown kind, which he thus implies to have been Divine. God Himself speaks, to impress the lessons of the past, and to excite the thoughts and feelings which would rightly celebrate the feast. The glad noises of song, harp, and trumpet are hushed; the psalmist is silent, to hear that dread Voice, and then with lowly lips he repeats so much of the majestic syllables as he could translate into words which it was possible for a man to utter. The inner coherence of the two parts of the psalm is, on this explanation, so obvious, that there is no need nor room for the hypothesis of two fragments having been fused into one.

The Divine Voice begins with recapitulating the facts which the feast was intended to commemorate—namely, the act of emancipation from Egyptian bondage (ver. 6), and the miracles of the wilderness sojourn (ver. 7). The compulsory labour, from which God delivered the people, is described by two terms, of which the former (burden) is borrowed from Exodus, where it frequently occurs (Exod. i. 11, v. 4, vi. 6), and the latter (basket) is by some supposed to mean the wicker-work implement for carrying, which the monuments show was in use in Egypt (so LXX., etc.), and by others to mean an earthen vessel, as "an example of the work in clay in which the Israelites were engaged" (Hupfeld). The years of desert wandering are summed up, in ver. 7, as one long continuance of benefits from God. Whenever they cried to Him in their trouble, He delivered them. He spoke to them "from the secret place of thunder" ("*My thunder-covert*," Cheyne). That expression is generally taken to refer to the pillar of cloud, but seems more naturally to be regarded as alluding to the thick darkness, in which God was shrouded on Sinai, when He spoke His law amid thunderings and lightnings. "The proving at the waters of Meribah" is, according to the connection and in harmony with Exod. xvii. 6, to be regarded as a benefit. "It was meant to serve the purpose of binding Israel still more closely to its God" (Baethgen). It is usually assumed that, in this reference to "the waters of Meribah," the two similar incidents of the miraculous supply of water—one of which occurred near the beginning of the forty years in the desert, at "Massah and Meribah" (Exod. xvii. 7), and the other at "the waters of Meribah," near Kadesh, in the fortieth year—have been blended, or, as Cheyne says, "confused." But there is no need to suppose that

there is any confusion, for the words of the psalm will apply to the latter miracle as well as to the former, and, if the former clause refers to the manifestations at Sinai, the selection of an incident at nearly the end of the wilderness period is natural. The whole stretch of forty years is thereby declared to have been marked by continuous Divine care. The Exodus was begun, continued, and ended amid tokens of His watchful love. The Selah bids the listener meditate on that prolonged revelation.

That retrospect next becomes the foundation of a Divine exhortation to the people, which is to be regarded as spoken originally to Israel in the wilderness, as ver. 11 shows. Perowne well designates these verses (8–10) "a discourse within a discourse." They put into words the meaning of the wilderness experience, and sum up the laws spoken on Sinai, which they in part repeat. The purpose of God's lavish benefits was to bind Israel to Himself. "Hear, My people," reminds us of Deut. v. 1, vi. 4. "I will bear witness to thee" here means rather solemn warning to, than testifying against, the person addressed. With infinite pathos, the tone of the Divine Speaker changes from that of authority to pleading and the utterance of a yearning wish, like a sigh. "Would that thou wouldest hearken!" God desires nothing so earnestly as that; but His Divine desire is tragically and mysteriously foiled. The awful human power of resisting His voice and of making His efforts vain, the still more awful fact of the exercise of that power, were clear before the psalmist, whose daring anthropopathy teaches a deep lesson, and warns us against supposing that men have to do with an impassive Deity. That wonderful utterance of Divine wish is almost a parenthesis. It

gives a moment's glimpse into the heart of God, and then the tone of command is resumed. "In ver. 9 the keynote of the revelation of the law from Sinai is given; the fundamental command which opens the Decalogue demanded fidelity towards Jehovah, and forbade idolatry, as the sin of sins" (Delitzsch). The reason for exclusive devotion to God is based in ver. 10, as in Exod. xx. 2, the fundamental passage, on His act of deliverance, not on His sole Divinity. A theoretic Monotheism would be cold; the consciousness of benefits received from One Hand alone is the only key that will unlock a heart's exclusive devotion and lay it at His feet. And just as the commandment to worship God alone is founded on His unaided delivering might and love, so it is followed by the promise that such exclusive adhesion to Him will secure the fulfilment of the boldest wishes, and the satisfying of the most clamant or hungry desires. "Open wide thy mouth, and I will fill it." It is folly to go to strange gods for the supply of needs, when God is able to give all that every man can wish. We may be well content to cleave to Him alone, since He alone is more than enough for each and for all. Why should *they* waste time and strength in seeking for supplies from many, who can find all they need in One? They who put Him to the proof, and find Him enough, will have, in their experience of His sufficiency, a charm to protect them from all vagrant desire to "go further and fare worse." The best defence against temptations to stray from God is the possession by experience, of His rich gifts that meet all desires. That great saying teaches, too, that God's bestowals are practically measured by men's capacity and desire. The ultimate limit of them is His own limitless grace; but the working limit in

each individual is the individual's receptivity, of which his expectancy and desire are determining factors.

In vv. 11, 12, the Divine Voice laments the failure of benefits and commandments and promises to win Israel to God. There is a world of baffled tenderness and almost wondering rebuke in the designation of the rebels as "My people." It would have been no cause of astonishment if other nations had not listened; but that the tribes bound by so many kindnesses should have been deaf is a sad marvel. Who should listen to "My voice" if "My people" do not? The penalty of not yielding to God is to be left unyielding. The worst punishment of sin is the prolongation and consequent intensifying of the sin. A heart that wilfully closes itself against God's pleadings brings on itself the nemesis, that it becomes incapable of opening, as a self-torturing Hindoo fakir may clench his fist so long, that at last his muscles lose their power, and it remains shut for his lifetime. The issue of such "stubbornness" is walking in their own counsels, the practical life being regulated entirely by self-originated and God-forgetting dictates of prudence or inclination. He who will not have the Divine Guide has to grope his way as well as he can. There is no worse fate for a man than to be allowed to do as he chooses. "The ditch," sooner or later, receives the man who lets his active powers, which are in themselves blind, be led by his understanding, which he has himself blinded by forbidding it to look to the One Light of Life.

In ver. 13 the Divine Voice turns to address the joyous crowd of festal worshippers, exhorting them to that obedience which is the true keeping of the feast, and holding forth bright promises of the temporal blessings which, in accordance with the fundamental

conditions of Israel's prosperity, should follow thereon. The sad picture of ancient rebellion just drawn influences the language in this verse, in which "My people," "hearken," and "walk" recur. The antithesis to walking in one's own counsels is walking in God's ways, suppressing native stubbornness, and becoming docile to His guidance. The highest blessedness of man is to have a will submissive to God's will, and to carry out that submission in all details of life. Self-engineered paths are always hard, and, if pursued to the end, lead into the dark. The listening heart will not lack guidance, and obedient feet will find God's way the way of peace which steadily climbs to unfading light.

The blessings attached in the psalm to such conformity with God's will are of an external kind, as was to be expected at the Old Testament stage of revelation. They are mainly two—victory and abundance. But the precise application of ver. 15*b* is doubtful. Whose "time" is to "endure for ever"? There is much to be said in favour of the translation "that so their time might endure for ever," as Cheyne renders, and for understanding it, as he does, as referring to the enemies who yield themselves to God, in order that they "might be a never-exhausted people." But to bring in the purpose of the enemies' submission is somewhat irrelevant, and the clause is probably best taken to promise length of days to Israel. In ver. 16 the sudden change of persons in *a* is singular, and, according to the existing vocalisation, there is an equally sudden change of tenses, which induces Delitzsch and others to take the verse as recurring to historical retrospect. The change to the third person is probably occasioned, as Hupfeld

suggests, by the preceding naming of Jehovah, or may have been due to an error. Such sudden changes are more admissible in Hebrew than with us, and are very easily accounted for, when God is represented as speaking. The momentary emergence of the psalmist's personality would lead him to say "He," and the renewed sense of being but the echo of the Divine Voice would lead to the recurrence to the "I," in which God speaks directly. The words are best taken as in line with the other hypothetical promises in the preceding verses. The whole verse looks back to Deut. xxxii. 13, 14. "Honey from the rock" is not a natural product; but, as Hupfeld says, the parallel "oil out of the flinty rock," which follows in Deuteronomy, shows that "we are here, not on the ground of the actual, but of the ideal," and that the expression is a hyperbole for incomparable abundance. Those who hearken to God's voice will have all desires satisfied and needs supplied. They will find furtherance in hindrances, fertility in barrenness; rocks will drop honey and stones will become bread.

PSALM LXXXII.

1 God stands in the congregation of God,
In the midst of the gods He judges.

2 How long will ye judge injustice,
And accept the persons of wicked men? Selah.
3 Right the weak and the orphan,
Vindicate the afflicted and the poor.
4 Rescue the weak and needy,
From the hand of the wicked deliver [them].

5 They know not, they understand not,
In darkness they walk to and fro,
All the foundations of the earth totter.
6 I myself have said, Ye are gods,
And sons of the Most High are ye all.
7 Surely like men shall ye die,
And like one of the princes shall ye fall.

8 Arise, O God, judge the earth,
For Thou, Thou shalt inherit all the nations.

IN Psalm l. God is represented as gathering His people together to be judged; in this psalm He has gathered them together for His judgment on judges. The former psalm begins at an earlier point of the great Cause than this one does. In it, unnamed messengers go forth to summons the nation; in this, the first verse shows us the assembled congregation, the accused, and the Divine Judge standing in "the midst" in statuesque immobility. An awe-inspiring

pause intervenes, and then the silence is broken by a mighty voice of reproof and admonition (vv. 2–4). The speaker may be the psalmist, but the grand image of God as judging loses much of its solemnity and appropriateness, unless these stern rebukes and the following verses till the end of ver. 7 are regarded as His voice of judgment. Ver. 5 follows these rebukes with "an indignant aside from the Judge" (Cheyne), evoked by obstinate deafness to His words; and vv. 6, 7, pronounce the fatal sentence on the accused, who are condemned by their own refusal to hearken to Divine remonstrances. Then, in ver. 8, after a pause like that which preceded God's voice, the psalmist, who has been a silent spectator, prays that what he has heard in the inward ear, and seen with the inward eye, may be done before the nations of the world, since it all belongs to Him by right.

The scene pictured in ver. 1 has been variously interpreted. "The congregation of God" is most naturally understood according to the parallel in Psalm l., and the familiar phrase "the congregation of Israel" as being the assembled nation. Its interpretation and that of the "gods" who are judged hang together. If the assembly is the nation, the persons at the bar can scarcely be other than those who have exercised injustice on the nation. If, on the other hand, the "gods" are ideal or real angelic beings, the assembly will necessarily be a heavenly one. The use of the expressions "The congregation of Jehovah" (Numb. xxvii. 17, xxxi. 16; Josh. xxii. 16, 17) and "Thy congregation" (Psalm lxxiv. 2) makes the former interpretation the more natural, and therefore exercises some influence in determining the meaning of the other disputed word. The interpretation of "gods" as

angels is maintained by Hupfeld; and Bleek, followed by Cheyne, goes the full length of regarding them as patron angels of the nations. But, as Baethgen says, "that angels should be punished with death is a thought which lies utterly beyond the Old Testament sphere of representation," and the incongruity can hardly be reckoned to be removed by Cheyne's remark, that, since angels are in other places represented as punished, "it is only a step further" to say that they are punished with death. If, however, these "gods" are earthly rulers, the question still remains whether they are Jewish or foreign judges? The latter opinion is adopted chiefly on the ground of the reference in ver. 8 to a world-embracing judicial act, which, however, by no means compels its acceptance, since it is entirely in accordance with the manner of psalmists to recognise in partial acts of Divine retribution the operation in miniature of the same Divine power, which will one day set right all wrongs, and, on occasion of the smaller manifestation of Divine righteousness, to pray for a universal judgment. There would be little propriety in summoning the national assembly to behold judgments wrought on foreign rulers, unless these alien oppressors were afflicting Israel, of which there is no sure indications in the psalm. The various expressions for the afflicted in vv. 3, 4, are taken, by the supporters of the view that the judges are foreigners, to mean the whole nation as it groaned under their oppression, but there is nothing to show that they do not rather refer to the helpless in Israel.

Our Lord's reference to ver. 6 in John x. 34–38 is, by the present writer, accepted as authoritatively settling both the meaning and the ground of the

remarkable name of "gods" for human judges. It does not need that we should settle the mystery of His emptying Himself, or trace the limits of His human knowledge, in order to be sure that He spoke truth with authority, when He spoke on such a subject as His own Divine nature, and the analogies and contrasts between it and the highest human authorities. His whole argument is worthless, unless the "gods" in the psalm are men. He tells us why that august title is applied to them—namely, because to them "the word of God came." They were recipients of a Divine word, constituting them in their office; and, in so far as they discharged its duties, their decrees were God's word ministered by them. That is especially true in a theocratic state such as Israel, where the rulers are, in a direct way, God's vicegerents, clothed by Him with delegated authority, which they exercise under His control. But it is also true about all who are set in similar positions elsewhere. The office is sacred, whatever its holders are.

The contents of the psalm need little remark. In vv. 2–4 God speaks in stern upbraiding and command. The abrupt pealing forth of the Divine Voice, without any statement of who speaks, is extremely dramatic and impressive. The judgment hall is filled with a hushed crowd. No herald is needed to proclaim silence. Strained expectance sits on every ear. Then the silence is broken. These authoritative accents can come but from one speaker. The crimes rebuked are those to which rulers, in such a state of society as was in Israel, are especially prone, and such as must have been well-nigh universal at the time of the psalmist. They were no imaginary evils against which these sharp arrows were launched. These princes were like those gibbeted

for ever in Isa. i.—loving gifts and following after rewards, murderers rather than judges, and fitter to be "rulers of Sodom" than of God's city. They had prostituted their office by injustice, had favoured the rich and neglected the poor, had been deaf to the cry of the helpless, had steeled their hearts against the miseries of the afflicted, and left them to perish in the gripe of the wicked. Such is the indictment. Does it sound applicable to angels?

For a moment the Divine Voice pauses. Will its tones reach any consciences? No. There is no sign of contrition among the judges, who are thus solemnly being judged. Therefore God speaks again, as if wondering, grieved, and indignant "at the blindness of their hearts," as His Son was when His words met the same reception from the same class. Ver. 5 might almost be called a Divine lament over human impenitence, ere the Voice swells into the fatal sentence. One remembers Christ's tears, as He looked across the valley to the city glittering in the morning sun. His tears did not hinder His pronouncing its doom; nor did His pronouncing its doom hinder His tears. These judges were without knowledge. They walked in darkness, because they walked in selfishness, and never thought of God's judgment. Their gait was insolent, as the form of the word "walk to and fro" implies. And, since they who were set to be God's representatives on earth, and to show some gleam of His justice and compassion, were ministers of injustice and vicegerents of evil, fostering what they should have crushed, and crushing whom they should have fostered, the foundations of society were shaken, and, unless these were swept away, it would be dissolved into chaos. Therefore the sentence must fall, as it does in vv. 6, 7.

The grant of dignity is withdrawn. They are stripped of their honours, as a soldier of his uniform before he is driven from his corps. The judge's robe, which they have smirched, is plucked off their shoulders, and they stand as common men.

PSALM LXXXIII.

1 O God, let there be no rest to Thee,
Be not dumb, and keep not still, O God.
2 For, behold, Thy enemies make a tumult,
And they who hate Thee lift up the head.
3 Against Thy people they make a crafty plot,
And consult together against Thy hidden ones.
4 They say, Come, and let us cut them off from [being] a nation,
And let the name of Israel be remembered no more.

5 For they consult together with one heart,
Against Thee they make a league:
6 The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites,
Moab and the Hagarenes,
7 Gebal and Ammon and Amalek,
Philistia with the dwellers in Tyre;
8 Asshur also has joined himself to them,
They have become an arm to the children of Lot. Selah

9 Do Thou to them as [to] Midian,
As [to] Sisera, [to] Jabin at the brook Kishon,
10 [Who] were destroyed at Endor,
[Who] became manure for the land.
11 Make them, their nobles, like Oreb and like Zeeb,
And like Zebah and like Zalmunnah all their princes,
12 Who say, Let us take for a possession to ourselves
The habitations of God.

13 My God, make them like a whirl of dust,
Like stubble before the wind,
14 Like fire [that] burns [the] forest,
And like flame [that] scorches [the] mountains.

15 So pursue them with Thy storm,
And with Thy tempest strike them with panic.
16 Fill their face with dishonour,
That they may seek Thy name, Jehovah.

17 Let them be ashamed and panic-struck for ever,
And let them be abashed and perish;
18 And let them know that Thou, [even] Thy name, Jehovah, alone,
Art the Most High over all the earth.

THIS psalm is a cry for help against a world in arms. The failure of all attempts to point to a period when all the allies here represented as confederate against Israel were or could have been united in assailing it, inclines one to suppose that the enumeration of enemies is not history, but poetic idealisation. The psalm would then be, not the memorial of a fact, but the expression of the standing relation between Israel and the outlying heathendom. The singer masses together ancient and modern foes of diverse nationalities and mutual animosities, and pictures them as burying their enmities and bridging their separations, and all animated by one fell hatred to the Dove of God, which sits innocent and helpless in the midst of them. There are weighty objections to this view; but no other is free from difficulties even more considerable. There are two theories which divide the suffrages of commentators. The usual assignment of date is to the league against Jehoshaphat recorded in 2 Chron. xx. But it is hard to find that comparatively small local confederacy of three peoples in the wide-reaching alliance described in the psalm. Chronicles enumerates the members of the league as being "the children of Moab and the children of Ammon, and with them some of the Ammonites," which last

unmeaning designation should be read, as in the LXX., "the Me'unim," and adds to these Edom (2 Chron. xx. 2, corrected text). Even if the contention of the advocates of this date for the psalm is admitted, and "the Me'unim" are taken to include the Arab tribes, whom the psalmist calls Ishmaelites and Hagarenes, there remains the fact that he names also Philistia, Amalek, Tyre, and Asshur, none of whom is concerned in the alliance against Jehoshaphat. It was, in fact, confined to eastern and south-eastern nations, with whom distant western tribes could have no common interest. Nor is the other view of the circumstances underlying the psalm free from difficulty. It advocates a Maccabean date. In 1 Macc. v. it is recorded that the nations round about were enraged at the restoration of the altar and dedication of the Temple after its pollution by Antiochus Epiphanes, and were ready to break out in hostility. Cheyne points to the occurrence in Maccabees of six of the ten names mentioned in the psalm. But of the four not mentioned, two are Amalek and Asshur, both of which had been blotted out of the roll of nations long before the Maccabees' era. "The mention of Amalek," says Cheyne, "is half-Haggadic, half-antiquarian." But what should Haggadic or antiquarian elements do in such a list? Asshur is explained on this hypothesis as meaning Syria, which is very doubtful, and, even if admitted, leaves unsolved the difficulty that the subordinate place occupied by the nation in question would not correspond to the importance of Syria in the time of the Maccabees. Of the two theories, the second is the more probable, but neither is satisfactory; and the view already stated, that the psalm does not refer to any actual alliance, seems to the present writer the most probable. The

world is up in arms against God's people; and what weapon has Israel? Nothing but prayer.

The psalm naturally falls into two parts, separated by Selah, of which the first (vv. 1–8) describes Israel's extremity, and the second (vv. 9–18) is its supplication.

The psalmist begins with earnest invocation of God's help, beseeching Him to break His apparent inactivity and silence. "Let there be no rest to Thee" is like Isa. lxii. 6. God seems passive. It needs but His Voice to break the dreary silence, and the foes will be scattered. And there is strong reason for His intervention, for they are *His* enemies, who riot and roar like the hoarse chafing of an angry sea, for so the word rendered "make a tumult" implies (Psalm xlvi. 3). It is "Thy people" who are the object of their crafty conspiracy, and it is implied that these are thus hated because they *are* God's people. Israel's prerogative, which evokes the heathen's rage, is the ground of Israel's confidence and the plea urged to God by it. Are we not Thy "hidden ones"? And shall a hostile world be able to pluck us from our safe hiding-place in the hollow of Thy hand? The idea of preciousness, as well as that of protection, is included in the word. Men store their treasures in secret places; God hides His treasures in the "secret of His face," the "glorious privacy of light" inaccessible. How vain are the plotters' whisperings against such a people!

The conspiracy has for its aim nothing short of blotting out the national existence and the very name of Israel. It is therefore high-handed opposition to God's counsel, and the confederacy is against *Him*. The true antagonists are, not Israel and the world, but God and the world. Calmness, courage, and confidence spring in the heart with such thoughts. They who

can feel that they are hid in God may look out, as from a safe islet on the wildest seas, and fear nothing. And all who will may hide in Him.

The enumeration of the confederates in vv. 6–8 groups together peoples who probably were never really united for any common end. Hatred is a very potent cement, and the most discordant elements may be fused together in the fire of a common animosity. What a motley assemblage is here! What could bring together in one company Ishmaelites and Tyrians Moab and Asshur? The first seven names in the list of allies had their seats to the east and south-east o Palestine. Edom, Moab, Ammon, and Amalek were ancestral foes, the last of which had been destroyed in the time of Hezekiah (1 Chron. iv. 43). The mention of descendants of Ishmael and Hagar, nomad Arab tribes to the south and east, recalls their ancestors' expulsion from the patriarchal family. Gebal is probably the mountainous region to the south of the Dead Sea. Then the psalmist turns to the west, to Philistia, the ancient foe, and Tyre, "the two peoples of the Mediterranean coast, which also appear in Amos (ch. i.; *cf.* Joel iii.) as making common cause with the Edomites against Israel" (Delitzsch). Asshur brings up the rear —a strange post for it to occupy, to be reduced to be an auxiliary to "the children of Lot," *i.e.* Moab and Ammon. The ideal character of this muster-roll is supported by this singular inferiority of position, as well as by the composition of the allied force, and by the allusion to the shameful origin of the two leading peoples, which is the only reference to Lot besides the narrative in Genesis.

The confederacy is formidable, but the psalmist does not enumerate its members merely in order to emphasise

Israel's danger. He is contrasting this miscellaneous conglomeration of many peoples with the Almighty One, against whom they are vainly banded. Faith can look without a tremor on serried battalions of enemies, knowing that one poor man, with God at his back, outnumbers them all. Let them come from east and west, south and north, and close round Israel; God alone is mightier than they. So, after a pause marked by Selah, in which there is time to let the thought of the multitudinous enemies sink into the soul, the psalm passes into prayer, which throbs with confident assurance and anticipatory triumph. The singer recalls ancient victories, and prays for their repetition. To him, as to every devout man, to-day's exigencies are as sure of Divine help as any yesterday's were, and what God has done is pledge and specimen of what He is doing and will do. The battle is left to be waged by Him alone. The psalmist does not seem to think of Israel's drawing sword, but rather that it should stand still and see God fighting for it. The victory of Gideon over Midian, to which Isaiah also refers as the very type of complete conquest (Isa. ix. 3), is named first, but thronging memories drive it out of the singer's mind for a moment, while he goes back to the other crushing defeat of Jabin and Sisera at the hands of Barak and Deborah (Judg. iv., v.). He adds a detail to the narrative in Judges, when he localises the defeat at Endor, which lies on the eastern edge of the great plain of Esdraelon. In ver. 11 he returns to his first example of defeat—the slaughter of Midian by Gideon. Oreb (raven) and Zeeb (wolf) were in command of the Midianites, and were killed by the Ephraimites in the retreat. Zebah and Zalmunnah were kings of Midian, and fell by Gideon's own hand

(Judg. viii. 21). The psalmist bases his prayer for such a dread fate for the foes on their insolent purpose and sacrilegious purpose of making the dwellings (or, possibly, the pastures) of God their own property. Not because the land and its peaceful homes belonged to the suppliant and his nation, but because they were God's, does he thus pray. The enemies had drawn the sword; it was permissible to pray that they might fall by the sword, or by some Divine intervention, since such was the only way of defeating their God-insulting plans.

The psalm rises to high poetic fervour and imaginative beauty in the terrible petitions of vv. 13–16. The word rendered "whirling dust" in ver. 13 is somewhat doubtful. It literally means *a rolling thing*, but what particular thing of the sort is difficult to determine. The reference is perhaps to "spherical masses of dry weeds which course over the plains." Thomson ("Land and Book," 1870, p. 563) suggests the wild artichoke, which, when ripe, forms a globe of about a foot in diameter. "In autumn the branches become dry and as light as a feather, the parent stem breaks off at the ground, and the wind carries these vegetable globes whithersoever it pleaseth. At the proper season thousands of them come scudding over the plain, rolling, leaping, bounding." So understood, the clause would form a complete parallel with the next, which compares the fleeing foe to stubble, not, of course, rooted, but loose and whirled before the wind. The metaphor of ver. 14 is highly poetic, likening the flight of the foe to the swift rush of a forest fire, which licks up (for so the word rendered *scorches* means) the woods on the hillsides, and leaves a bare, blackened space. Still more terrible is the petition in ver. 15, which asks

that God Himself should chase the flying remnants, and beat them down, helpless and panic-striken, with storm and hurricane, as He did the other confederacy of Canaanitish kings, when they fled down the pass of Beth-Horon, and "Jehovah cast down great stones on them from heaven" (Josh. x. 10, 11).

But there is a deeper desire in the psalmist's heart than the enemies' destruction. He wishes that they should be turned into God's friends, and he wishes for their chastisement as the means to that end. "That they may seek Thy face, Jehovah," is the sum of his aspirations, as it is the inmost meaning of God's punitive acts. The end of the judgment of the world, which is continually going on by means of the history of the world, is none other than what this psalmist contemplated as the end of the defeat of that confederacy of God's enemies—that rebels should seek His face, not in enforced submission, but with true desire to sun themselves in its light, and with heart-felt acknowledgment of His Name as supreme through all the earth. The thought of God as standing alone in His majestic omnipotence, while a world is vainly arrayed against Him, which we have traced in vv. 5–7, is prominent in the close of the psalm. The language of ver. 18 is somewhat broken, but its purport is plain, and its thought is all the more impressive for the irregularity of construction. God alone is the Most High. He is revealed to men by His Name. It stands alone, as He in His nature does. The highest good of men is to know that that sovereign Name is unique and high above all creatures, hostile or obedient. Such knowledge is God's aim in punishment and blessing. Its universal extension must be the deepest wish of all who have for themselves learned how strong

a fortress against a world in arms that Name is; and their desires for the foes of God and themselves are not in harmony with God's heart, nor with this psalmist's song, unless they are, that His enemies may be led, by salutary defeat of their enterprises and experience of the weight of God's hand, to bow, in loving obedience, low before the Name which, whether they recognise the fact or not, is high above all the earth.

PSALM LXXXIV.

1 How lovely are Thy dwellings,
Jehovah of Hosts!
2 My soul longs, yea, even languishes, for the courts of Jehovah,
My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.
3 Yea, the sparrow has found a house,
And the swallow a nest for herself, where she lays her young,
Thine altars, Jehovah of Hosts,
My King and my God.
4 Blessed they that dwell in Thy house!
They will be still praising Thee. Selah.

5 Blessed the man whose strength is in Thee,
In whose heart are the ways!
6 [Who] passing through the valley of weeping make it a place of fountains,
Yea, the early rain covers it with blessings.
7 They go from strength to strength,
Each appears before God in Zion.
8 Jehovah, God of Hosts, hear my prayer,
Give ear, O God of Jacob. Selah.

9 [Thou], our shield, behold, O God,
And look upon the face of Thine anointed.
10 For better is a day in Thy courts than a thousand,
Rather would I lie on the threshold in the house of my God,
Than dwell in the tents of wickedness.
11 For Jehovah God is sun and shield,
Grace and glory Jehovah gives,
No good does He deny to them that walk in integrity.
12 Jehovah of Hosts,
Blessed the man that trusts in Thee!

THE same longing for and delight in the sanctuary which found pathetic expression in Psalms xlii., xliii., inspire this psalm. Like these, it is ascribed in

the superscription to the Korachites, whose office of door-keepers in the Temple seems alluded to in ver. 10. To infer, however, identity of authorship from similarity of tone is hazardous. The differences are as obvious as the resemblances. As Cheyne well says, "the notes of the singer of Psalms xlii., xliii., are here transposed into a different key. It is still 'Te saluto, te suspiro,' but no longer 'De longinquo te saluto' (to quote Hildebert)." The longings after God and the sanctuary, in the first part of the psalm, do not necessarily imply exile from the latter, for they may be felt when we are nearest to Him, and are, in fact, an element in that nearness. It is profitless to inquire what were the singer's circumstances. He expresses the perennial emotions of devout souls, and his words are as enduring and as universal as the aspirations which they so perfectly express. No doubt the psalm identifies enjoyment of God's presence with the worship of the visible sanctuary more closely than we have to do, but the true object of its longing is God, and so long as spirit is tied to body the most spiritual worship will be tied to form. The psalm may serve as a warning against premature attempts to dispense with outward aids to inward communion.

It is divided into three parts by the Selahs. The last verse of the first part prepares the way for the first of the second, by sounding the note of "Blessed they," etc., which is prolonged in ver. 5. The last verse of the second part (ver. 8) similarly prepares for the first of the third (ver. 9) by beginning the prayer which is prolonged there. In each part there is a verse pronouncing blessing on Jehovah's worshippers, and the variation in the designations of these gives the key to the progress of thought in the psalm.

First comes the blessing on those who dwell in God's house (ver. 4), and that abiding is the theme of the first part. The description of those who are thus blessed is changed, in the second strophe, to "those in whose heart are the [pilgrim] ways," and the joys of the progress of the soul towards God are the theme of that strophe. Finally, for dwelling in and journeying towards the sanctuary is substituted the plain designation of "the man that trusts in Thee," which trust is the impulse to following after God and the condition of dwelling with Him; and its joys are the theme of the third part.

The man who thus interpreted his own psalm had no unworthy conception of the relation between outward nearness to the sanctuary, and inward communion with the God who dwelt there. The psalmist's yearning for the Temple was occasioned by his longing for God. It was God's presence there which gave it all its beauty. Because they were "Thy tabernacles," he felt them to be lovely and lovable, for the word implies both. The abrupt exclamation beginning the psalm is the breaking into speech of thought which had long increased itself in silence. The intensity of his desires is expressed very strikingly by two words, of which the former (*longs*) literally means *grows pale*, and the latter *fails*, or *is consumed*. His whole being, body and spirit, is one cry for the living God. The word rendered "cry out" is usually employed for the shrill cry of joy, and that meaning is by many retained here. But the cognate noun is not infrequently employed for any loud or high-pitched call, especially for fervent prayer (Psalm lxxxviii. 2), and it is better to suppose that this clause expresses emotion substantially parallel to that of the former

one, than that it makes a contrast to it. "The living God" is an expression only found in Psalm xlii., and is one of the points of resemblance between it and this psalm. That Name is more than a contrast with the gods of the heathen. It lays bare the reason for the psalmist's longings. By communion with Him who possesses life in its fulness, and is its fountain for all that live, he will draw supplies of that "life whereof our veins are scant." Nothing short of a real, living Person can slake the immortal thirst of the soul, made after God's own life, and restless till it rests in Him. The surface current of this singer's desires ran towards the sanctuary; the depth of them set towards God; and, for the stage of revelation at which he stood, the deeper was best satisfied through the satisfaction of the more superficial. The one is modified by the progress of Christian enlightenment, but the other remains eternally the same. Alas that the longings of Christian souls for fellowship with God should be so tepid, as compared with the sacred passion of desire which has found imperishable utterance in these glowing and most sincere words!

Ver. 3 has been felt to present grammatical difficulties, which need not detain us here. The easiest explanation is that the happy, winged creatures who have found resting-places are contrasted by the psalmist with himself, seeking, homeless amid creation, for his haven of repose. We have to complete the somewhat fragmentary words with some supplement before "Thine altars," such as "So would I find," or the like. To suppose that he represents the swallows as actually nesting on the altar is impossible, and, if the latter clauses are taken to describe the places where the birds housed and bred, there is nothing to suggest the

purpose for which the reference to them is introduced. If, on the other hand, the poet looks with a poet's eye on these lower creatures at rest in secure shelters, and longs to be like them, in his repose in the home which his deeper wants make necessary for him, a noble thought is expressed with adequate poetic beauty. "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air roosting-places, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." All creatures find environment suited to their need, and are at rest in it, man walks like a stranger on earth, and restlessly seeks for rest. Where but in God is it to be found? Who that seeks it in Him shall fail to find it? What their nests are to the swallows, God is to man. The solemnity of the direct address to God at the close of ver. 3 would be out of place if the altar were the dwelling of the birds, but is entirely natural if the psalmist is thinking of the Temple as the home of his spirit. By the accumulation of sacred and dear names, and by the lovingly reiterated "my," which claims personal relation to God, he deepens his conviction of the blessedness which would be his, were he in that abode of his heart, and lingeringly tells his riches, as a miser might delight to count his gold, piece by piece.

The first part closes with an exclamation which gathers into one all-expressive word the joy of communion with God. They who have it are "blessed," with something more sacred and lasting than happiness, with something deeper and more tranquil than joy, even with a calm delight, not altogether unlike the still, yet not stagnant, rest of supreme felicity which fills the life of the living and ever-blessed God. That thought is prolonged by the music.

The second strophe (vv. 5–8) is knit to the first,

chain-wise, by taking up again the closing strain, "Blessed the man!" But it turns the blessedness in another direction. Not only are they blessed who have found their rest in God, but so also are they who are seeking it. The goal is sweet, but scarcely less sweet are the steps towards it. The fruition of God has delights beyond all that earth can give, but the desire after Him, too, has delights of its own. The experiences of the soul seeking God in His sanctuary are here cast into the image of pilgrim bands going up to the Temple. There may be local allusions in the details. The "ways" in ver. 5 are the pilgrims' paths to the sanctuary. Hupfeld calls the reading "ways" senseless, and would substitute "trust"; but such a change is unnecessary, and tasteless. The condensed expression is not too condensed to be intelligible, and beautifully describes the true pilgrim spirit. They who are touched with that desire which impels men to "seek a better country, that is an heavenly," and to take flight from Time's vanities to the bosom of God, have ever "the ways" in their hearts. They count the moments lost during which they linger, or are anywhere but on the road. Amid calls of lower duties and distractions of many sorts, their desires turn to the path to God. Like some nomads brought into city life, they are always longing to escape. The caged eagle sits on the highest point of his prison, and looks with filmed eye to the free heavens. Hearts that long for God have an irrepressible instinct stinging them to ever-new attainments. The consciousness of "not having already attained" is no pain, when the hope of attaining is strong. Rather, the very blessedness of life lies in the sense of present imperfection, the effort for completeness, and the assurance of reaching it.

Ver. 6 is highly imaginative and profoundly true. If a man has "the ways" in his heart, he will pass through "the valley of weeping," and turn it into a "place of fountains." His very tears will fill the wells. Sorrow borne as a help to pilgrimage changes into joy and refreshment. The remembrance of past grief nourishes the soul which is aspiring to God. God puts our tears into His bottle; we lose the benefit of them, and fail to discern their true intent, unless we gather them into a well, which may refresh us in many a weary hour thereafter. If we do, there will be another source of fertility, plentifully poured out upon our life's path. "The early rain covers it with blessings." Heaven-descended gifts will not be wanting, nor the smiling harvests which they quicken and mature. God meets the pilgrims' love and faith with gently falling influences, which bring forth rich fruit. Trials borne aright bring down fresh bestowments of power for fruitful service. Thus possessed of a charm which transforms grief, and recipients of strength from on high, the pilgrims are not tired by travel, as others are, but grow stronger day by day, and their progressive increase in vigour is a pledge that they will joyously reach their journey's end, and stand in the courts of the Lord's house. The seekers after God are superior to the law of decay. It may affect their physical powers, but they are borne up by an unfulfilled and certain hope, and reinvigorated by continual supplies from above; and therefore, though in their bodily frame they, like other men, faint and grow weary, they shall not utterly fail, but, waiting on Jehovah, "will renew their strength." The fabled fountain of perpetual youth rises at the foot of God's throne, and its waters flow to meet those who journey thither.

Such are the elements of the blessedness of those who seek God's presence; and with that great promise of certain finding of the good and the God whom they seek, the description and the strophe properly ends. But just as the first part prepared the way for the second, so the second does for the third, by breaking forth into prayer. No wonder that the thoughts which he has been dwelling on should move the singer to supplication that these blessednesses may be his. According to some, ver. 8 is the prayer of the pilgrim on arriving in the Temple, but it is best taken as the psalmist's own.

The final part begins with invocation. In ver. 9 "our shield" is in apposition to "God," not the object to "behold." It anticipates the designation of God in ver. 11. But why should the prayer for "Thine anointed" break in upon the current of thought? Are we to say that the psalmist "completes his work by some rhythmical but ill-connected verses" (Cheyne)? There is a satisfactory explanation of the apparently irrelevant petition, if we accept the view that the psalm, like its kindred Psalms xlii., xliii., was the work of a companion of David's in his flight. If so, the king's restoration would be the condition of satisfying the psalmist's longing for the sanctuary. Any other hypothesis as to his date and circumstances fails to supply a connecting link between the main subject of the psalm and this petition. The "For" at the beginning of ver. 10 favours such a view, since it gives the delights of the house of the Lord, and the psalmist's longing to share in them, as the reasons for his prayer that Jehovah would look upon the face of His anointed. In that verse he glides back to the proper theme of the psalm. Life is to be estimated, not according to its length, but according to the richness of its contents. Time is

elastic. One crowded moment is better than a millennium of languid years. And nothing fills life so full or stretches the hours to hold so much of real living, as communion with God, which works, on those who have plunged into its depths, some assimilation to the timeless life of Him with whom "one day is as a thousand years." There may be a reference to the Korachites' function of door-keepers, in that touchingly beautiful choice of the psalmist's, rather to lie on the threshold of the Temple than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. Whether there is or not, the sentiment breathes sweet humility, and deliberate choice. Just as the poet has declared that the briefest moment of communion is in his sight to be preferred to years of earthly delight, so he counts the humblest office in the sanctuary, and the lowest place there, if only it is within the doorway, as better than aught besides. The least degree of fellowship with God has delights superior to the greatest measure of worldly joys. And this man, knowing that, chose accordingly. How many of us know it, and yet cannot say with him, "Rather would I lie on the door-sill of the Temple than sit in the chief places of the world's feasts!"

Such a choice is the only rational one. It is the choice of supreme good, correspondent to man's deepest needs, and lasting as his being. Therefore the psalmist vindicates his preference, and encourages himself in it, by the thoughts in ver. 11, which he introduces with "For." Because God is what He is, and gives what He gives, it is the highest wisdom to take Him for our true good, and never to let Him go. He is "sun and shield." This is the only place in which He is directly called a sun, though the idea conveyed is common. He is "the master light of all our seeing," the fountain of

warmth, illumination, and life. His beams are too bright for human eyes to gaze on, but their effluence is the joy of creation. They who look to Him "shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." What folly to choose darkness rather than light, and, when that Sun is high in the heavens, ready to flood our hearts with its beams, to prefer to house ourselves in gloomy caverns of our own sad thoughts and evil doings! Another reason for the psalmist's choice is that God is a shield. (Compare ver. 9.) Who that knows the dangers and foes that cluster thick round every life can wisely refuse to shelter behind that ample and impenetrable buckler? It is madness to stand in the open field, with arrows whizzing invisible all round, when one step, one heartfelt desire, would place that sure defence between us and every peril. God being such, "grace and glory" will flow from Him to those who seek Him. These two are given simultaneously, not, as sometimes supposed, in succession, as though grace were the sum of gifts for earth, and glory the all-comprehending expression for the higher bestowments of heaven. The psalmist thinks that both are possessed here. *Grace* is the sum of God's gifts, coming from His loving regard to His sinful and inferior creatures. *Glory* is the reflection of His own lustrous perfection, which irradiates lives that are turned to Him, and makes them shine, as a poor piece of broken pottery will, when the sunlight falls on it. Since God is the sum of all good, to possess Him is to possess it all. The one gift unfolds into all things lovely and needful. It is the raw material, as it were, out of which can be shaped, according to transient and multiform needs, everything that can be desired or can bless a soul.

But high as is the psalmist's flight of mystic devotion, he does not soar so far as to lose sight of plain morality, as mystics have often been apt to do. It is the man who walks in his integrity who may hope to receive these blessings. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord"; and neither access to His house nor the blessings flowing from His presence can belong to him who is faithless to his own convictions of duty. The pilgrim paths are paths of righteousness. The psalmist's last word translates his metaphors of dwelling in and travelling towards the house of Jehovah into their simple meaning, "Blessed is the man that *trusteth* in Thee." That trust both seeks and finds God. There has never been but one way to His presence, and that is the way of trust. "I am the way. . . . No man cometh to the Father but by Me." So coming, we shall find, and then shall seek more eagerly and find more fully, and thus shall possess at once the joys of fruition and of desires always satisfied, never satiated, but continually renewed.

PSALM LXXXV.

1 Thou hast become favourable, Jehovah, to Thy land,
Thou hast turned back the captivity of Jacob.
2 Thou hast taken away the iniquity of Thy people,
Thou hast covered all their sin.
3 Thou hast drawn in all Thy wrath,
Thou hast turned Thyself from the glow of Thine anger.

4 Turn us, O God of our salvation,
And cause Thine indignation towards us to cease.
5 For ever wilt Thou be angry with us?
Wilt Thou stretch out Thine anger to generation after generation?
6 Wilt Thou not revive us again,
That Thy people may rejoice in Thee?
7 Show us, Jehovah, Thy loving-kindness,
And give us Thy salvation.

8 I will hear what God, Jehovah, will speak,
For He will speak peace to His people and to His favoured [ones];
Only let them not turn again to folly.
9 Surely near to them who fear Him is His salvation,
That glory may dwell in our land.
10 Loving-kindness and Troth have met together,
Righteousness and Peace have kissed [each other].
11 Troth springs from the earth,
And Righteousness looks down from heaven.
12 Yea, Jehovah will give that which is good,
And our land will give her increase.
13 Righteousness shall go before Him,
And shall make His footsteps a way.

THE outstanding peculiarity of this psalm is its sudden transitions of feeling. Beginning with exuberant thanksgiving for restoration of the nation

(vv. 1–3), it passes, without intermediate gradations, to complaints of God's continued wrath and entreaties for restoration (vv. 4–7), and then as suddenly rises to joyous assurance of inward and outward blessings. The condition of the exiles returned from Babylon best corresponds to such conflicting emotions. The book of Nehemiah supplies precisely such a background as fits the psalm. A part of the nation had returned indeed, but to a ruined city, a fallen Temple, and a mourning land, where they were surrounded by jealous and powerful enemies. Discouragement had laid hold on the feeble company; enthusiasm had ebbed away; the harsh realities of their enterprise had stripped off its imaginative charm; and the mass of the returned settlers had lost heart as well as devout faith. The psalm accurately reflects such a state of circumstances and feelings, and may, with some certitude, be assigned, as it is by most commentators, to the period of return from exile.

It falls into three parts, of increasing length,—the first, of three verses (vv. 1–3), recounts God's acts of mercy already received; the second, of four verses (vv. 4–7), is a plaintive prayer in view of still remaining national afflictions; and the third, of six verses, a glad report by the psalmist of the Divine promises which his waiting ear had heard, and which might well quicken the most faint-hearted into triumphant hope.

In the first strophe one great fact is presented in a threefold aspect, and traced wholly to Jehovah. "Thou hast turned back the captivity of Jacob." That expression is sometimes used in a figurative sense for any restoration of prosperity, but is here to be taken literally. Now, as at first, the restored Israel, like

their ancestors under Joshua, had not won the land by their own arm, but "because God had a favour unto them," and had given them favour in the eyes of those who carried them captive. The restoration of the Jews, seen from the conqueror's point of view, was a piece of state policy, but from that of the devout Israelite was the result of God's working upon the heart of the new ruler of Babylon. The fact is stated in ver. 1; a yet more blessed fact, of which it is most blessed as being a token, is declared in ver. 2.

The psalmist knows that captivity had been chastisement, the issue of national sin. Therefore he is sure that restoration is the sign of forgiveness. His thoughts are running in the same line as in Isa. xl. 2, where the proclamation to Jerusalem that her iniquity is pardoned is connected with the assurance that her hard service is accomplished. He uses two significant words for pardon, both of which occur in Psalm xxxii. In ver. 2 *a* sin is regarded as a weight pressing down the nation, which God's mercy lifts off and takes away; in ver. 2 *b* it is conceived of as a hideous stain or foulness, which His mercy hides, so that it is no longer an offence to heaven. Ver. 3 ventures still deeper into the sacred recesses of the Divine nature, and traces the forgiveness, which in act had produced so happy a change in Israel's position, to its source in a change in God's disposition. "Thou hast drawn in all Thy wrath," as a man does his breath, or, if the comparison may be ventured, as some creature armed with a sting retracts it into its sheath. "Thou hast turned Thyself from the glow of Thine anger" gives the same idea under another metaphor. The word "turn" has a singular fascination for this psalmist. He uses it five times (vv. 1, 3, 4, 6—*lit.*, wilt Thou not turn, quicken us?—and 8). God's

turning from His anger is the reason for Israel's returning from captivity.

The abruptness of the transition from joyous thanksgiving to the sad minor of lamentation and supplication is striking, but most natural, if the psalmist was one of the band of returning exiles, surrounded by the ruins of a happier past, and appalled by the magnitude of the work before them, the slenderness of their resources, and the fierce hostility of their neighbours. The prayer of ver. 4, "Turn us," is best taken as using the word in the same sense as in ver. 1, where God is said to have "turned" the captivity of Jacob. What was there regarded as accomplished is here conceived of as still to be done. That is, the restoration was incomplete, as we know that it was, both in regard to the bulk of the nation, who still remained in exile, and in regard to the depressed condition of the small part of it which had gone back to Palestine. In like manner the petitions of ver. 5 look back to ver. 3, and pray that the anger which there had been spoken of as passed may indeed utterly cease. The partial restoration of the people implied, in the psalmist's view, a diminution rather than a cessation of God's punitive wrath, and he beseeches Him to complete that which He had begun.

The relation of the first to the second strophe is not only that of contrast, but the prayers of the latter are founded upon the facts of the former, which constitute both grounds for the suppliant's hope of answer and pleas with God. He cannot mean to deliver by halves. The mercies received are incomplete; and His work must be perfect. He cannot be partially reconciled, nor have meant to bring His people back to the land, and then leave them to misery. So the

contrast between the bright dawning of the Return and its clouded day is not wholly depressing; for the remembrance of what has been heartens for the assurance that what is shall not always be, but will be followed by a future more correspondent to God's purpose as shown in that past. When we are tempted to gloomy thoughts by the palpable incongruities between God's ideals and man's realisation of them, we may take a hint from this psalmist, and, instead of concluding that the ideal was a phantasm, argue with ourselves that the incomplete actual will one day give way to the perfect embodiment. God leaves no work unfinished. He never leaves off till He has done. His beginnings guarantee congruous endings. He does not half withdraw His anger; and, if He seems to do so, it is only because men have but half turned from their sins. This psalm is rich in teaching as to the right way of regarding the incompleteness of great movements which, in their incipient stages, were evidently of God. It instructs us to keep the Divine intervention which started them clearly in view; to make the shortcomings, which mar them, a subject of lowly prayer; and to be sure that all which He begins He will finish, and that the end will fully correspond to the promise of the beginning. A "day of the Lord" which rose in brightness may cloud over as its hours roll, but "at eventide it shall be light," and none of the morning promise will be unfulfilled.

The third strophe (vv. 8–13) brings solid hopes, based upon Divine promises, to bear on present discouragements. In ver. 8 the psalmist, like Habakkuk (ii. 1), encourages himself to listen to what God will speak. The word "I will hear" expresses resolve or desire, and might be rendered *Let me hear*, or *I would*

hear. Faithful prayer will always be followed by patient and faithful waiting for response from God. God will not be silent, when His servant appeals to Him with recognition of His past mercies, joined with longing that these may be perfected. No voice will break the silence of the heavens; but, in the depths of the waiting soul, there will spring a sweet assurance which comes from God, and is really His answer to prayer, telling the suppliant that "He will speak peace to His people," and warning them not to turn away from Him to other helps, which is folly. "His favoured ones" seems here to be meant as coextensive with "His people." Israel is regarded as having entered into covenant relations with God; and the designation is the pledge that what God speaks will be "peace." That word is to be taken in its widest sense, as meaning, first and chiefly, peace with Him, who has "turned Himself from His anger"; and then, generally, well-being of all kinds, outward and inward, as a consequence of that rectified relation with God.

The warning of ver. 8 *c* is thought by some to be out of place, and an emendation has been suggested, which requires little change in the Hebrew—namely, "to those who have turned their hearts towards Him." This reading is supported by the LXX.; but the warning is perfectly appropriate, and carries a large truth—that the condition of God's speaking of peace is our firm adherence to Him. Once more the psalmist uses his favourite word "turn." God had turned the captivity; He had turned Himself from His anger; the psalmist had prayed Him to turn or restore the people, and to turn and revive them, and now He warns against turning again to folly. There is always danger of relapse in those who have experienced God's

delivering mercy. There is a blessed turning, when they are brought from the far-off land to dwell near God. But there is a possible fatal turning away from the Voice that speaks peace, and the Arm that brings salvation, to the old distance and bondage. Strange that any ears, which have heard the sweetness of His still small Voice whispering Peace, should wish to stray where it cannot be heard! Strange that the warning should ever be required, and tragic that it should so often be despised!

After the introductory ver. 8, the substance of what Jehovah spoke to the psalmist is proclaimed in the singer's own words. The first assurance which the psalmist drew from the Divine word was that God's salvation, the whole fulness of His delivering grace both in regard to external and in inward evils, is ever near to them that fear Him. "Salvation" here is to be taken in its widest sense. It means, negatively, deliverance from all possible evils, outward and inward; and, positively, endowment with all possible good, both for body and spirit. With such fulness of complete blessings, they, and they only, who keep near to God, and refuse to turn aside to foolish confidences, shall be enriched. That is the inmost meaning of what God said to the psalmist; and it is said to all. And that salvation being thus possessed, it would be possible for "glory"—*i.e.*, the manifest presence of God, as in the Shechinah—to tabernacle in the land. The condition of God's dwelling with men is their acceptance of His salvation. That purifies hearts to be temples.

The lovely personifications in vv. 10–13 have passed into Christian poetry and art, but are not clearly apprehended when they are taken to describe the harmonious meeting and co-operation, in Christ's

great work, of apparently opposing attributes of the Divine nature. No such thoughts are in the psalmist's mind. Loving-kindness and Faithfulness or Troth are constantly associated in Scripture as Divine attributes. Righteousness and Peace are as constantly united, as belonging to the perfection of human character. Ver. 10 seems to refer to the manifestation of God's Loving-kindness and Faithfulness in its first clause, and to the exhibition of His people's virtues and consequent happiness in its second. In all God's dealings for His people, His Loving-kindness blends with Faithfulness. In all His people's experience Righteousness and Peace are inseparable. The point of the assurance in ver. 10 is that heaven and earth are blended in permanent amity. These four radiant angels "dwell in the land." Then, in ver. 11, there comes a beautiful inversion of the two pairs of personifications, of each of which one member only reappears. Troth or Faithfulness, which in ver. 10 came into view principally as a Divine attribute, in ver. 11 is conceived of as a human virtue. It "springs out of the earth"—that is, is produced among men. All human virtue is an echo of the Divine, and they who have received into their hearts the blessed results of God's Faithfulness will bring forth in their lives fruits like it in kind. Similarly, Righteousness, which in ver. 10 was mainly viewed as a human excellence, here appears as dwelling in and looking down from heaven, like a gracious angel smiling on the abundance of Faithfulness which springs from earth. Thus "the bridal of the earth and sky" is set forth in these verses.

The same idea is further presented in ver. 12, in its most general form. God gives that which is good, both outward and inward blessings, and, thus fructified

by bestowments from above, earth yields her increase. His gifts precede men's returns. Without sunshine and rain there are no harvests. More widely still, God gives first before He asks. He does not gather where He has not strawed, nor reap what He has not sown. Nor does He only sow, but He "blesses the springing thereof"; and to Him should the harvest be rendered. He gives before we can give. Isa. xlv. 8 is closely parallel, representing in like manner the co-operation of heaven and earth, in the new world of Messianic times.

In ver. 13 the thought of the blending of heaven and earth, or of Divine attributes as being the foundation and parents of their human analogues, is still more vividly expressed. Righteousness, which in ver. 10 was regarded as exercised by men, and in ver. 11 as looking down from heaven, is now represented both as a herald preceding God's royal progress, and as following in His footsteps. The last clause is rendered in different ways, which all have the same general sense. Probably the rendering above is best: "Righteousness shall make His footsteps a way"—that is, for men to walk in. All God's workings among men, which are poetically conceived as His way, have stamped on them Righteousness. That strong angel goes before Him to clear a path for Him, and trace the course which He shall take. That is the imaginative expression of the truth—that absolute, inflexible Righteousness guides all the Divine acts. But the same Righteousness, which precedes, also follows Him, and points His footsteps as the way for us. The incongruity of this double position of God's herald makes the force of the thought greater. It is the poetical embodiment of the truth, that the perfection of man's character and conduct lies

in his being an "imitator of God," and that, however different in degree, our righteousness must be based on His. What a wonderful thought that is, that the union between heaven and earth is so close that God's path is our way! How deep into the foundation of ethics the psalmist's glowing vision pierces! How blessed the assurance that God's Righteousness is revealed from heaven to make men righteous!

Our psalm needs the completion, which tells of that gospel in which "the Righteousness of God from faith is revealed for faith." In Jesus the "glory" has tabernacled among men. He has brought heaven and earth together. In Him God's Loving-kindness and Faithfulness have become denizens of earth, as never before. In Him heaven has emptied its choicest good on earth. Through Him our barrenness and weeds are changed into harvests of love, praise, and service. In Him the Righteousness of God is brought near; and, trusting in Him, each of us may tread in His footsteps, and have His Righteousness fulfilled in us "who walk, not after the flesh, but after the spirit."

PSALM LXXXVI.

1 Bow down Thine ear, Jehovah, answer me,
For I am afflicted and poor.
2 Keep my soul, for I am favoured [by Thee],
Save Thy servant, O Thou my God,
That trusts in Thee.
3 Be gracious to me, Lord,
For to Thee I cry all the day.
4 Rejoice the soul of Thy servant,
For to Thee, Lord, do I lift up my soul.
5 For Thou, Lord, art good and forgiving,
And plenteous in loving-kindness to all who call on Thee.

6 Give ear, Jehovah, to my prayer,
And take heed to the voice of my supplications.
7 In the day of my straits will I call [on] Thee,
For Thou wilt answer me.
8 There is none like Thee among the gods, O Lord,
And no [works] like Thy works.
9 All nations whom Thou hast made
Shall come and bow themselves before Thee,
And shall give glory to Thy Name.
10 For great art Thou and doest wonders,
Thou art God alone.
11 Teach me, Jehovah, Thy way,
I will walk in Thy troth,
Unite my heart to fear Thy Name.
12 I will thank Thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart,
And I will glorify Thy Name for ever.
13 For Thy loving-kindness is great towards me,
And Thou hast delivered my soul from Sheol beneath.

14 O God, the proud have risen against me,
And a crew of violent men have sought after my soul,
And have not set Thee before them.

15 But Thou, Lord, art a God compassionate and gracious,
Long-suffering and plenteous in loving-kindness and troth.
16 Turn to me and be gracious to me,
Give Thy strength to Thy servant,
And save the son of Thy handmaid.
17 Work for me a sign for good,
That they who hate me may see and be ashamed,
For Thou, Jehovah, hast helped me and comforted me.

THIS psalm is little more than a mosaic of quotations and familiar phrases of petition. But it is none the less individual, nor is the psalmist less heavily burdened, or less truly beseeching and trustful, because he casts his prayer into well-worn words. God does not give "originality" to every devout man; and He does not require it as a condition of accepted prayer. Humble souls, who find in more richly endowed men's words the best expression of their own needs, may be encouraged by such a psalm. Critics may think little of it, as a mere cento; but God does not refuse to bow His ear, though He is asked to do so in borrowed words. A prayer full of quotations may be heartfelt, and then it will be heard and answered. This psalmist has not only shown his intimate acquaintance with earlier devotional words, but he has woven his garland with much quiet beauty, and has blended its flowers into a harmony of colour all his own.

There is no fully developed strophical arrangement, but there is a discernible flow of thought, and the psalm may be regarded as falling into three parts.

The first of these (vv. 1–5) is a series of petitions, each supported by a plea. The petitions are the well-worn ones which spring from universal need, and there is a certain sequence in them. They begin with "Bow down Thine ear," the first of a suppliant's desires, which, as it were, clears the way for those which follow.

Trusting that he will not ask in vain, the psalmist then prays that God would "keep" his soul as a watchful guardian or sentry does, and that, as the result of such care, he may be saved from impending perils. Nor do his desires limit themselves to deliverance. They rise to more inward and select manifestations of God's heart of tenderness, for the prayer "Be gracious" asks for such, and so goes deeper into the blessedness of the devout life than the preceding. And the crown of all these requests is "Rejoice the soul of Thy servant," with the joy which flows from experience of outward deliverance and of inward whispers of God's grace, heard in the silent depths of communion with Him. It matters not that every petition has parallels in other psalms, which this singer is quoting. His desires are none the less his, because they have been shared by a company of devout souls before him. His expression of them is none the less his, because his very words have been uttered by others. There is rest in thus associating oneself with an innumerable multitude who have "cried to God and been lightened." The petition in ver. 1 is like that in Psalm lv. 2. Ver. 2 sounds like a reminiscence of Psalm xxv. 20; ver. 3 closely resembles Psalm lvii. 1.

The pleas on which the petitions are grounded are also beautifully wreathed together. First, the psalmist asks to be heard because he is afflicted and poor (compare Psalm xl. 17). Our need is a valid plea with a faithful God. The sense of it drives us to Him; and our recognition of poverty and want must underlie all faithful appeal to Him. The second plea is capable of two interpretations. The psalmist says that he is *Chasid*; and that word is by some commentators taken to mean *one who exercises*, and by others *one who is the*

subject of, Chesed—i.e., loving-kindness. As has been already remarked on Psalm iv. 3, the passive meaning —*i.e.*, one to whom God's loving-kindness is shown—is preferable. Here it is distinctly better than the other. The psalmist is not presenting his own character as a plea, but urging God's gracious relation to him, which, once entered on, pledges God to unchanging continuance in manifesting His loving-kindness. But, though the psalmist does not plead his character, he does, in the subsequent pleas, present his faith, his daily and day-long prayers, and his lifting of his desires, aspirations, and whole self above the trivialities of earth to set them on God. These are valid pleas with Him. It cannot be that trust fixed on Him should be disappointed, nor that cries perpetually rising to His ears should be unanswered, nor that a soul stretching its tendrils heavenward should fail to find the strong stay, round which it can cling and climb. God owns the force of such appeals, and delights to be moved to answer, by the spreading before Him of His servant's faith and longings.

But all the psalmist's other pleas are merged at last in that one contained in ver. 5, where he gazes on the revealed Name of God, and thinks of Him as He had been described of old, and as this suppliant delights to set to his seal that he has found Him to be—good and placable, and rich in loving-kindness. God is His own motive, and Faith can find nothing mightier to urge with God, nor any surer answer to its own doubts to urge with itself, than the unfolding of all that lies in the Name of the Lord. These pleas, like the petitions which they support, are largely echoes of older words. "Afflicted and poor" comes, as just noticed, from Psalm xl. 17. The designation of "one

whom God favours" is from Psalm iv. 3. "Unto Thee do I lift up my soul" is taken verbatim from Psalm xxv. 1. The explication of the contents of the Name of the Lord, like the fuller one in ver. 15, is based upon Exod. xxxiv. 6.

Vv. 6–13 may be taken together, as the prayer proper, to which vv. 1–5 are introductory. In them there is, first, a repetition of the cry for help, and of the declaration of need (vv. 6, 7); then a joyful contemplation of God's unapproachable majesty and works, which insure the ultimate recognition of His Name by all nations (vv. 8–10); then a profoundly and tenderly spiritual prayer for guidance and consecration—wants more pressing still than outward deliverance (ver. 11); and, finally, as in so many psalms, anticipatory thanksgivings for deliverance yet future, but conceived of as present by vivid faith.

Echoes of earlier psalms sound through the whole; but the general impression is not that of imitation, but of genuine personal need and devotion. Ver. 7 is like Psalm xvii. 6 and other passages; ver. 8*a* is from Exod. xv. 11; ver. 8*b* is modelled on Deut. iii. 24; ver. 9, on Psalm xxii. 27; ver. 11*a*, on Psalm xxvii. 11; ver. 11*b*, on Psalm xxvi. 3; "Sheol beneath" is from Deut. xxxii. 22. But, withal, there are unity and progress in this cento of citations. The psalmist begins with reiterating his cry that God would hear, and in ver. 7 advances to the assurance that He will. Then in vv. 8–10 he turns from all his other pleas to dwell on his final one (ver. 5) of the Divine character. As, in the former verse, he had rested his calm hope on God's willingness to help, so now he strengthens himself, in assurance of an answer, by the thought of God's unmatched power, the unique majesty of His works

and His sole Divinity. Ver. 8 might seem to assert only Jehovah's supremacy above other gods of the heathen; but ver. 10 shows that the psalmist speaks the language of pure Monotheism. Most naturally the prophetic assurance that all nations shall come and worship Him is deduced from His sovereign power and incomparableness. It cannot be that "the nations whom Thou hast made" shall for ever remain ignorant of the hand that made them. Sooner or later that great character shall be seen by all men in its solitary elevation; and universal praise shall correspond to His sole Divinity.

The thought of God's sovereign power carries the psalmist beyond remembrance of his immediate outward needs, and stirs higher desires in him. Hence spring the beautiful and spiritual petitions of ver. 11, which seek for clearer insight into God's will concerning the psalmist's conduct, breathe aspirations after a "walk" in that God-appointed way and in "Thy troth," and culminate in one of the sweetest and deepest prayers of the Psalter: "Unite my heart to fear Thy Name." There, at least, the psalmist speaks words borrowed from no other, but springing fresh from his heart's depths. Jer. xxxii. 39 is the nearest parallel, and the commandment in Deut. vi. 5, to love God "with all thine heart," may have been in the psalmist's mind; but the prayer is all his own. He has known the misery of a divided heart, the affections and purposes of which are drawn in manifold directions, and are arrayed in conflict against each other. There is no peace nor blessedness, neither is any nobility of life possible, without whole-hearted devotion to one great object; and there is no object capable of evoking such devotion or worthy to receive it, except Him who is "God alone."

Divided love is no love. It must be "all in all, or not at all." With deep truth, the command to love God with all the heart is based upon His Unity—"Hear, O Israel: The Lord thy God is one Lord; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart" (Deut. vi. 4). The very conception of religion requires that it should be exclusive, and should dominate the whole nature. It is only God who is great enough to fill and engage all our capacities. Only the mass of the central sun is weighty enough to make giant orbs its satellites, and to wheel them in their courses. There is no tranquillity nor any power in lives frittered away on a thousand petty loves. The river that breaks into a multitude of channels is sucked up in the sand without reaching the ocean, and has no force in its current to scour away obstructions. Concentration makes strong men; consecration makes saints. "This one thing I do" is the motto of all who have done anything worthy. "Unite my heart to fear Thy Name" is the prayer of all whose devotion is worthy of its object, and is the source of joy and power to themselves. The psalmist asks for a heart made one with itself in the fear of God, and then vows that, with that united heart, he will praise his delivering God. As in many other psalms, he anticipates the answers to his prayers, and in ver. 13 speaks of God's loving-kindness as freshly manifested to him, and of deliverance from the dismal depths of the unseen world, which threatened to swallow him up. It seems more in accordance with the usage in similar psalms to regard ver. 13 as thus recounting, with prophetic certainty, the coming deliverance as if it were accomplished, than to suppose that in it the psalmist is falling back on former instances of God's rescuing grace.

In the closing part (vv. 14–17), the psalmist describes more precisely his danger. He is surrounded by a rabble rout of proud and violent men, whose enmity to him is, as in so many of the psalms of persecuted singers, a proof of their forgetfulness of God. Right against this rapid outline of his perils, he sets the grand unfolding of the character of God in ver 15. It is still fuller than that in ver. 5, and, like it, rests on Exod xxxiv. Such juxtaposition is all that is needed to show how little he has to fear from the hostile crew. On one hand are they, in their insolence and masterfulness, eagerly hunting after his life; on the other is God with His infinite pity and loving-kindness. Happy are they who can discern high above dangers and foes the calm presence of the only God, and, with hearts undistracted and undismayed, can oppose to all that assails them the impenetrable shield of the Name of the Lord! It concerns our peaceful fronting of the darker facts of life, that we cultivate the habit of never looking at dangers or sorrows without seeing the helping God beside and above them.

The psalm ends with prayer for present help. If God is, as the psalmist has seen Him to be, "full of compassion and gracious," it is no presumptuous petition that the streams of these perfections should be made to flow towards a needy suppliant. "Be gracious to *me*" asks that the light, which pours through the universe, may fall on one heart, which is surrounded by earth-born darkness. As in the introductory verses, so in the closing petitions, the psalmist grounds his prayer principally on God's manifested character, and secondarily on his own relation to God. Thus in ver. 16 he pleads that he is God's servant, and "the son of Thy handmaid" (compare Psalm cxvi. 16). That express

sion does not imply any special piety in the psalmist's mother, but pleads his hereditary relation as servant to God, or, in other words, his belonging by birth to Israel, as a reason for his prayers being heard. His last petition for "a sign" does not necessarily mean a miracle, but a clear manifestation of God's favour, which might be as unmistakably shown by an every-day event as by a supernatural intervention. To the devout heart, all common things are from God, and bear witness for Him. Even blind eyes and hard hearts may be led to see and feel that God is the helper and comforter of humble souls who trust in Him. A heart that is made at peace with itself by the fear of God, and has but one dominant purpose and desire, will long for God's mercies, not only because they have a bearing on its own outward well-being, but because they will demonstrate that it is no vain thing to wait on the Lord, and may lead some, who cherished enmity to God's servant and alienation from Himself, to learn the sweetness of His Name and the security of trust in Him.

PSALM LXXXVII.

1 His foundation on the holy mountains,
2 The gates of Zion Jehovah loves
More than all the dwellings of Jacob.
3 Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God. Selah.

4 I will proclaim Rahab and Babylon as those who know Me:
"Behold Philistia and Tyre, with Cush;
This one was born there."
5 And of Zion it shall be said,
"Man after man was born in her,"
And He, the Most High, shall establish her.
6 Jehovah shall reckon when He writes down the peoples,
"This one was born there." Selah.

7 And singers and dancers [shall chant],
"All my fountains are in Thee."

ONE clear note sounds in this remarkable psalm. Its single theme is the incorporation of ancestral foes and distant nations with the people of God. Aliens are to be enrolled as home-born citizens of Jerusalem. In modern words, the vision of a universal Church, a brotherhood of humanity, shines radiant before the seer. Other psalmists and prophets have like insight into the future expansion of the nation, but this psalm stands alone in the emphasis which it places upon the idea of birth into the rights of citizenship. This singer has had granted to him a glimpse of two great truths—the universality of the Church, and the mode of entrance into it by reception

of a new life. To what age of Israel he belonged is uncertain. The mention of Babylon as among the enemies who have become fellow-citizens favours the supposition of a post-exilic date, which is also supported by resemblances to Isa. xl.–lxvi.

The structure is simple. The psalm is divided by Selah into two strophes, to which a closing verse is appended. The first strophe bursts abruptly into rapturous praise of Zion, the beloved of God. The second predicts the gathering of all nations into her citizenship, and the closing verse apparently paints the exuberant joy of the festal crowds, who shall then throng her streets.

The abrupt beginning of the first strophe offends some commentators, who have tried to smooth ver. 1 into propriety and tameness, by suggesting possible preliminary clauses, which they suppose to have dropped out. But there is no canon which forbids a singer, with the rush of inspiration, either poetic or other, on him, to plunge into the heart of his theme. Ver. 1 may be construed, as in the A.V. and R.V. (text), as a complete sentence, but is then somewhat feeble. It is better to connect it with ver. 2, and to regard "His foundation upon the holy mountains" as parallel with "the gates of Zion," and as, like that phrase, dependent on the verb "loves." Hupfeld, indeed, proposes to transfer "Jehovah loves" from the beginning of ver. 2, where it now stands, to the end of ver. 1, supplying the verb mentally in the second clause. He thus gets a complete parallelism :—

> **His foundation upon the holy mountains Jehovah loves,**
> **The gates of Zion before all the dwellings of Jacob.**

But this is not necessary; for the verb may as well

be supplied to the first as to the second clause. The harshness of saying "His foundation," without designating the person to whom the pronoun refers, which is extreme if ver. 1 is taken as a separate sentence, is diminished when it is regarded as connected with ver. 2, in which the mention of Jehovah leaves no doubt as to whose the "foundation" is. The psalmist's fervent love for Jerusalem is something more than national pride. It is the apotheosis of that emotion, clarified and hallowed into religion. Zion is founded by God Himself. The mountains on which it stands are made holy by the Divine dwelling. On their heads shines a glory before which the light that lies on the rock crowned by the Parthenon or on the seven hills of Rome pales. Not only the Temple mountain is meant, but the city is the psalmist's theme. The hills, on which it stands, are emblems of the firmness of its foundation in the Divine purpose, on which it reposes. It is beloved of God, and that, as the form of the word "loves" shows, with an abiding affection. The "glorious things" which are spoken of Zion may be either the immediately following Divine oracle, or, more probably, prophetic utterances such as many of those in Isaiah, which predict its future glory. The Divine utterance which follows expresses the substance of these. So far, the psalm is not unlike other outpourings in praise of Zion, such as Psalm xlviii. But, in the second strophe, to which the first is introductory, the singer strikes a note all his own.

There can be no doubt as to who is the speaker in ver. 4. The abrupt introduction of a Divine Oracle accords with a not infrequent usage in the Psalter, which adds much to the solemnity of the words. If we regard the "glorious things" mentioned in ver. 3

as being the utterances of earlier prophets, the psalmist has had his ears purged to hear God's voice, by meditation on and sympathy with these The faithful use of what God has said prepares for hearing further disclosures of His lips. The enumeration of nations in ver. 4 carries a great lesson. First comes the ancient enemy, Egypt, designated by the old name of contempt (Rahab, *i.e.* pride), but from which the contempt has faded; then follows Babylon, the more recent inflicter of many miseries, once so detested, but towards whom animosity has died down. These two, as the chief oppressors, between whom, like a piece of metal between hammer and anvil, Israel's territory lay, are named first, with the astonishing declaration that God will proclaim them as among those who know Him. That knowledge, of course, is not merely intellectual, but the deeper knowledge of personal acquaintance or friendship—a knowledge of which love is an element, and which is vital and transforming. Philistia is the old neighbour and foe, which from the beginning had hung on the skirts of Israel, and been ever ready to utilise her disasters and add to them. Tyre is the type of godless luxury and inflated material prosperity, and, though often in friendly alliance with Israel, as being exposed to the same foes which harassed her, she was as far from knowing God as the other nations were. Cush, or Ethiopia, seems mentioned as a type of distant peoples, rather than because of its hostility to Israel. God points to these nations—some of them near, some remote, some powerful and some feeble, some hereditarily hostile and some more or less amicable with Israel—and gives forth the declaration concerning them, "This one was born there."

God's voice ceases, and in ver. 5 the psalmist takes

up the wonderful promise which he has just heard. He slightly shifts his point of view: for while the nations that were to be gathered into Zion were the foremost figures in the Divine utterance, the Zion into which they are gathered is foremost in the psalmist's, in ver. 5. Its glory, when thus enriched by a multitude of new citizens, bulks in his eyes more largely than their blessedness. Another shade of difference between the two verses is that, in the former, the ingathering of the peoples is set forth as collective or national incorporation, and, in the latter,—as the expression "man after (or *by*) man" suggests,—individual accession is more clearly foretold. The establishment of Zion, which the psalmist prophesies, is the result of her reinforcement by these new citizens. The grand figure of ver. 6 pictures God as taking a census of the whole world; for it is "the peoples" whom He numbers As he writes down each name, He says concerning it, "This one was born there." That list of citizens is "the Book of the Living." So "the end of all history is that Zion becomes the metropolis of all people" (Delitzsch).

Three great truths had dawned on this psalmist, though their full light was reserved for the Christian era. He had been led to apprehend that the Jewish Church would expand into a world-wide community. If one thinks of the gulfs of hatred and incompatibility which parted the peoples in his day, his clear utterance of that great truth, the apprehension of which so far transcended his time, and the realisation of which so far transcends ours, will surely be seen to be due to a Divine breath. The broadest New Testament expression of Universalism does not surpass the psalmist's confident certainty. "There is neither Greek nor Jew,

barbarian, Scythian," says no more than he said. More remarkable still is his conception of the method by which the nations should be gathered in to Zion. They are to be "born there." Surely there shines before the speaker some glimmering ray of the truth that incorporation with the people of God is effected by the communication of a new life, a transformation of the natural, which will set men in new affinities, and make them all brethren, because all participant of the same wondrous birth. It would be anachronism to read into the psalm the clear Christian truth "Ye must be born again," but it would be as false a weakening of its words to refuse to see in them the germ of that truth. The third discovery which the psalmist has made, or rather the third revelation which he has received, is that of the individual accession of the members of the outlying nations. The Divine voice, in ver. 4, seems to speak of birth into citizenship as national; but the psalmist, in ver. 6, represents Jehovah as writing the names of individuals in the burgess-roll, and of saying in regard to each, as He writes, "This one was born there." In like manner, in ver. 5, the form of expression is "Man after man," which brings out the same thought, with the addition that there is an unbroken series of new citizens. It is by accession of single souls that the population of Zion is increased. God's register resolves the community into its component units. Men are born one by one, and one by one they enter the true kingdom. In the ancient world the community was more than the individual. But in Christ the individual acquires new worth, while the bands of social order are not thereby weakened, but made more stringent and sacred. The city, whose inhabitants have one by one been won by its King, and

have been knit to Him in the sacred depths of personal being, is more closely "compact together" than the mechanical aggregations which call themselves civil societies. The unity of Christ's kingdom does not destroy national characteristics any more than it interferes with individual idiosyncrasies. The more each constituent member is himself, the more will he be joined to others, and contribute his special mite to the general wealth and well-being.

Ver. 7 is, on any interpretation, extremely obscure, because so abrupt and condensed. But probably the translation adopted above, though by no means free from difficulty or doubt, brings out the meaning which is most in accordance with the preceding. It may be supposed to flash vividly before the reader's imagination the picture of a triumphal procession of rejoicing citizens, singers as well as dancers, who chant, as they advance, a joyous chorus in praise of the city, in which they have found all fountains of joy and satisfaction welling up for their refreshment and delight.

PSALM LXXXVIII.

1 Jehovah, God of my salvation,
By day, by night I cry before Thee.
2 Let my prayer come before Thy face,
Bow Thine ear to my shrill cry.
3 For sated with troubles is my soul,
And my life has drawn near to Sheol.
4 I am counted with those that have gone down to the pit,
I am become as a man without strength.
5 [I am] free among the dead,
Like the slain that lie in the grave,
Whom Thou rememberest no more,
But they are cut off from Thy hand.
6 Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit,
In dark places, in the deeps.
7 Upon me Thy wrath presses hard,
And [with] all Thy breakers Thou hast afflicted [me]. Selah
8 Thou hast put my familiar friends far from me,
Thou hast made me an abomination to them,
I am shut up so that I cannot come forth.

9 My eye wastes away because of affliction,
I have called on Thee daily, Jehovah,
I have spread out my palms to Thee.
10 For the dead canst Thou do wonders?
Or can the shades arise [and] praise Thee? Selah.
11 In the grave can Thy loving-kindness be told,
And Thy faithfulness in destruction?
12 Can Thy wonders be made known in darkness,
And Thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?

13 But I, I have cried unto Thee, Jehovah,
And in the morning my prayer comes to meet Thee.
14 Why, Jehovah, dost Thou cast off my soul,
[And] hidest Thy face from me?

15 Afflicted am I and at the point of death from [my] youth,
I have borne Thy terrors [till] I am distracted.
16 Over me have Thy [streams of] wrath passed,
Thy horrors have cut me off.
17 They have compassed me about like waters all the day,
They have come round me together.
18 Thou hast put far from me lover and friend,
My familiar friends are—darkness.

A PSALM which begins with "God of my salvation" and ends with "darkness" is an anomaly. All but unbroken gloom broods over it, and is densest at its close. The psalmist is so "weighed upon by sore distress," that he has neither definite petition for deliverance nor hope. His cry to God is only a long-drawn complaint, which brings no respite from his pains nor brightening of his spirit. But yet to address God as the God of his salvation, to discern His hand in the infliction of sorrows, is the operation of true though feeble faith. "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him," is the very spirit of this psalm. It stands alone in the Psalter, which would be incomplete as a mirror of phases of devout experience, unless it had one psalm expressing trust which has ceased to ask or hope for the removal of life-long griefs, but still clasps God's hand even in the "darkness." Such experience is comparatively rare, and is meant to be risen above. Therefore this psalm stands alone. But it is not unexampled, and all moods of the devout life would not find lyrical expression in the book unless this deep note was once sounded.

It is useless to inquire what was the psalmist's affliction. His language seems to point to physical disease, of long continuance and ever threatening a fatal termination; but in all probability sickness is a

symbol here, as so often. What racked his sensitive spirit matters little. The cry which his pains evoked is what we are concerned with. There is little trace of strophical arrangement, and commentators differ much in their disposition of the parts of the psalm. But we venture to suggest a principle of division which has not been observed, in the threefold recurrence of "I cry" or "I call," accompanied in each case by direct address to Jehovah. The resulting division into three parts gives, first, the psalmist's description of his hopeless condition as, in effect, already dead (vv. 1–8); second, an expostulation with God on the ground that, if the psalmist is actually numbered with the dead, he can no more be the object of Divine help, nor bring God praise (vv. 9–12); and, third, a repetition of the thoughts of the first part, with slight variation and addition.

The central portion of the first division is occupied with an expansion of the thought that the psalmist is already as good as dead (vv. 3 *b*–6). The condition of the dead is drawn with a powerful hand, and the picture is full of solemn grandeur and hopelessness. It is preceded in vv. 1, 2, by an invocation which has many parallels in the psalms, but which here is peculiarly striking. This saddest of them all has for its first words the Name which ought to banish sadness. He who can call on Jehovah as the God of his salvation possesses a charm which has power to still agitation, and to flush despair with some light of hope as from an unrisen sun. But this poet feels no warmth from the beams, and the mists surge up, if not to hide the light, yet to obscure it. All the more admirable, then, the persistence of his cry; and all the more precious the lesson that Faith is not to let present

experience limit its conceptions. God is none the less the God of salvation and none the less to be believed to be so, though no consciousness of His saving power blesses the heart at the moment.

Ver. 1 *b* is obscure. Psalm xxii. 2 and other places suggest that the juxtaposition of day and night is meant to express the continuity of the psalmist's prayer; but, as the text now stands, the first part of the clause can only mean "In the time (day) when I cry," and the second has to be supplemented so as to read "[My cry comes] before Thee." This gives a poor meaning, and there is probability in the slight emendation on the word for *day*, which is required in order to make it an adverb of time equivalent to "In the day," as in the passage already quoted. Another emendation, adopted by Graetz, Bickell, and Cheyne, changes "God of" into "my God," and "my salvation" into "I cry" (the same word as in ver. 13), and attaches "by day" to the first clause. The result is,—

> Jehovah, my God, I cry to Thee by day,
> I call in the night before Thee.

The changes are very slight and easy, and the effect of them is satisfactory. The meaning of the verse is obvious, whether the emendation is accepted or not. The gain from the proposed change is dearly purchased by the loss of that solitary expression of hope in the name of "God of my salvation," the one star which gleams for a moment through a rift in the blackness.

With "For" in ver. 3 the psalmist begins the dreary description of his affliction, the desperate and all but deodly character of which he spreads before God as a reason for hearing his prayer. Despair sometimes strikes men dumb, and sometimes makes them eloquent. The sorrow which has a voice is less crushing than

that which is tongueless. This overcharged heart finds relief in self-pitying depicting of its burdens, and in the exercise of a gloomy imagination, which draws out in detail the picture of the feebleness, the recumbent stillness, the seclusion and darkness of the dead. They have "no strength." Their vital force has ebbed away, and they are but as weak shadows, having an impotent existence, which does not deserve to be called life. The remarkable expression of ver. 5, "free among the dead," is to be interpreted in the light of Job iii. 19, which counts it as one blessing of the grave, that "there the servant is free from his master." But the psalmist thinks that that "freedom" is loathsome, not desirable, for it means removal from the stir of a life, the heaviest duties and cares of which are better than the torpid immunity from these, which makes the state of the dead a dreary monotony. They lie stretched out and motionless. No ripple of cheerful activity stirs that stagnant sea. One unvarying attitude is theirs. It is not the stillness of rest which prepares for work, but of incapacity of action or of change. They are forgotten by Him who remembers all that are. They are parted from the guiding and blessing influence of the Hand that upholds all being. In some strange fashion they are and yet are not. Their death has a simulacrum of life. Their shadowy life is death. Being and non-being may both be predicated of them. The psalmist speaks in riddles; and the contradictions in his speech reflect his dim knowledge of that place of darkness. He looks into its gloomy depths, and he sees little but gloom. It needed the resurrection of Jesus to flood these depths with light, and to show that the life beyond may be fuller of bright activity than life here—a state in which vital strength is increased

beyond all earthly experience, and wherein God's all-quickening hand grasps more closely, and communicates richer gifts than are attainable in that death which sense calls life.

Ver. *7* traces the psalmist's sorrows to God. It breathes not complaint but submission, or, at least, recognition of His hand; and they who, in the very paroxysm of their pains, can say, "It is the Lord," are not far from saying, "Let Him do what seemeth Him good," nor from the peace that comes from a compliant will. The recognition implies, too, consciousness of sin which has deserved the "wrath" of God, and in such consciousness lies the germ of blessing. Sensitive nerves may quiver, as they feel the dreadful weight with which that wrath presses down on them, as if to crush them; but if the man lies still, and lets the pressure do its work, it will not force out his life, but only his evil, as foul water is squeezed from cloth. Ver. *7 b* is rendered by Delitzsch "All Thy billows Thou pressest down," which gives a vivid picture; but "billows" is scarcely the word to use for the downward rushing waters of a cataract, and the ordinary rendering, adopted above, requires only natural supplements.

Ver. 8 approaches nearer to a specification of the psalmist's affliction. If taken literally, it points to some loathsome disease, which had long clung to him, and made even his friends shrink from companionship, and thus had condemned him to isolation. All these details suggest leprosy, which, if referred to here, is most probably to be taken, as sickness is in several psalms, as symbolic of affliction. The desertion by friends is a common feature in the psalmists' complaints. The seclusion as in a prison-house is, no doubt, appropriate to the leper's condition, but may

also simply refer to the loneliness and compulsory inaction arising from heavy trials. At all events, the psalmist is flung back friendless on himself, and hemmed in, so that he cannot expatiate in the joyous bustle of life. Blessed are they who, when thus situated, can betake themselves to God, and find that He does not turn away! The consciousness of His loving presence has not yet lighted the psalmist's soul; but the clear acknowledgment that it is God who has put the sweetness of earthly companionship beyond his reach is, at least, the beginning of the happier experience, that God never makes a solitude round a soul without desiring to fill it with Himself.

If the recurring cry to Jehovah in ver. 9 is taken, as we have suggested it should be, as marking a new turn in the thoughts, the second part of the psalm will include vv. 9–12. Vv. 10–12 are apparently the daily prayer referred to in ver. 9. They appeal to God to preserve the psalmist from the state of death, which he has just depicted himself as having in effect already entered, by the consideration which is urged in other psalms as a reason for Divine intervention (vi. 5, xxx. 9, etc.)—namely, that His power had no field for its manifestation in the grave, and that He could draw no revenue of praise from the pale lips that lay silent there. The conception of the state of the dead is even more dreary than that in vv. 4, 5. They are "shades," which word conveys the idea of relaxed feebleness. Their dwelling is Abaddon—*i.e.*, "destruction,"—"darkness," "the land of forgetfulness" whose inhabitants remember not, nor are remembered, either by God or man. In that cheerless region, God had no opportunity to show His wonders of delivering mercy, for monotonous immobility was stamped upon it, and

out of that realm of silence no glad songs of praise could sound. Such thoughts are in startling contrast with the hopes that sparkle in some psalms (such as xvi. 10, etc.), and they show that clear, permanent assurance of future blessedness was not granted to the ancient Church. Nor could there be sober certainty of it until after Christ's resurrection. But it is also to be noticed that this psalm neither affirms nor denies a future resurrection. It does affirm continuous personal existence after death, of however thin and shadowy a sort. It is not concerned with what may lie far ahead, but is speaking of the present state of the dead, as it was conceived of, at the then stage of revelation, by a devout soul, in its hours of despondency.

The last part (vv. 13–18) is marked, like the two preceding, by the repetition of the name of Jehovah, and of the allusion to the psalmist's continual prayer. It is remarkable, and perhaps significant, that the time of prayer should here be "the morning," whereas in ver. 1 it was, according to Delitzsch, *the night*, or, according to the other rendering, *day and night*. The psalmist had asked in ver. 2 that his prayer might enter into God's presence; he now vows that it will come to meet Him. Possibly some lightening of his burden may be hinted at by the reference to the time of his petition. Morning is the hour of hope, of new vigour, of a fresh beginning, which may not be only a prolongation of dreary yesterdays. But if there is any such alleviation, it is only for a moment, and then the cloud settles down still more heavily. But one thing the psalmist has won by his cry. He now longs to know the reason for his affliction. He is confident that God is righteous when He afflicts, and, heavy as his sorrow is, he has passed beyond mere complaint con-

cerning it, to the wish to understand it. The consciousness that it is chastisement, occasioned by his own evil, and meant to purge that evil away, is present, in a rudimentary form at least, in that cry, "*Why* castest Thou off my soul?" If sorrow has brought a man to offer that prayer, it has done its work, and will cease before long, or, if it lasts, will be easier to bear, when its meaning and purpose are clear. But the psalmist rises to such a height but for a moment, though his momentary attaining it gives promise that he will, by degrees, be able to remain there permanently. It is significant that the only direct naming of Jehovah, in addition to the three which accompany the references to his prayers, is associated with this petition for enlightenment. The singer presses close to God in his faith that His hardest blows are not struck at random, and that His administration has for its basis, not caprice, but reason, moved by love and righteousness.

Such a cry is never offered in vain, even though it should be followed, as it is here, by plaintive reiterations of the sufferer's pains. These are now little more than a summary of the first part. The same idea of being in effect dead even while alive is repeated in ver. 15, in which the psalmist wails that from youth he had been but a dying man, so close to him had death seemed, or so death-like had been his life. He has borne God's terrors till he is distracted. The word rendered "I am distracted" is only used here, and consequently is obscure. Hupfeld and others deny that it is a word at all (he calls it an "Unwort"), and would read another which means *to become torpid*. The existing text is defended by Delitzsch and others, who take the word to mean to be weakened in mind or

bewildered. The meaning of the whole seems to be as rendered above. But it might also be translated, as by Cheyne, "I bear Thy terrors, my senses must fail." In ver. 16 the word for wrath is in the plural, to express the manifold outbursts of that deadly indignation. The word means literally heat; and we may represent the psalmist's thought as being that the wrath shoots forth many fierce tongues of licking flame, or, like a lava stream, pours out in many branches. The word rendered "Cut me off" is anomalous, and is variously translated *annihilate, extinguish*, or as above. The wrath which was a fiery flame in ver. 16 is an overwhelming flood in ver. 17. The complaint of ver. 8 recurs in ver. 18, in still more tragic form. All human sympathy and help are far away, and the psalmist's only familiar friend is—darkness. There is an infinitude of despair in that sad irony. But there is a gleam of hope, though faint and far, like faint daylight seen from the innermost recesses of a dark tunnel, in his recognition that his dismal solitude is the work of God's hand; for, if God has made a heart or a life empty of human love, it is that He may Himself fill it with His own sweet and all-compensating presence.

PSALM LXXXIX

1 The loving-kindnesses of Jehovah will I sing for ever,
To generation after generation will I make known Thy Faithfulness with my mouth.
2 For I said, For ever shall Loving-kindness be built up,
The heavens—in them wilt Thou establish Thy Faithfulness,

3 I have made a covenant with My chosen one,
I have sworn to David My servant;
4 For ever will I establish thy seed,
And build up thy throne to generation after generation. Selah.

5 And the heavens shall make known Thy wonders, Jehovah,
Thy Faithfulness also in the congregation of Thy holy ones.
6 For who in the skies can be set beside Jehovah,
[Or] likened to Jehovah, amongst the sons of the mighty ones?

7 A God very terrible in the council of the holy ones,
And dread above all round about Him.
8 Jehovah, God of Hosts, who like Thee is mighty, Jah?
And Thy Faithfulness [is] round Thee.

9 Thou, Thou rulest the insolence of the sea,
When its waves lift themselves on high, Thou, Thou stillest them
10 Thou, Thou hast crushed Rahab as one that is slain,
By the arm of Thy strength Thou hast scattered Thine enemies.

11 Thine are the heavens, Thine also the earth,
The world and its fulness, Thou, Thou hast founded them.
12 North and south, Thou, Thou hast created them,
Tabor and Hermon shout for joy at Thy Name.

13 Thine is an arm with might,
Strong is Thy hand, high is Thy right hand.

14 Righteousness and Justice are the foundation of Thy throne,
Loving-kindness and Troth go to meet Thy face.

15 Blessed the people who know the festal shout!
Jehovah, in the light of Thy face they walk.
16 In Thy Name do they exult all the day,
And in Thy righteousness are they exalted.

17 For the glory of their strength art Thou,
And in Thy favour shall our horn be exalted.
18 For to Jehovah [belongs] our shield,
And to the Holy One of Israel our king.

19 Then Thou didst speak in vision to Thy favoured one and didst say,
I have laid help upon a hero,
I have exalted one chosen from the people,
20 I have found David My servant,
With My holy oil have I anointed him.

21 With whom My hand shall be continually,
Mine arm shall also strengthen him,
22 No enemy shall steal upon him,
And no son of wickedness shall afflict him.

23 And I shatter his adversaries before him,
And them that hate him will I smite,
24 And My Faithfulness and My Loving-kindness [shall be] with him,
And in My name shall his horn be exalted.
25 And I will set his hand on the sea,
And his right hand on the rivers.

26 He, he shall call upon Me, My Father art Thou,
My God and the rock of my salvation.
27 Also I, I will give him [to be My] first-born,
Higher than the kings of the earth.

28 For ever will I keep for him My Loving-kindness,
And My covenant shall be inviolable towards him.
29 And I will make his seed [to last] for ever,
And his throne as the days of heaven.

30 If his sons forsake My law,
And walk not in My judgments,
31 If they profane My statutes,
And keep not My commandments,

32 Then will I visit their transgression with a rod,
And their iniquity with stripes.
33 But My Loving-kindness will I not break off from him,
And I will not be false to My Faithfulness.

34 I will not profane My covenant,
And that which has gone forth from My lips will I not change.
35 Once have I sworn by My holiness,
Verily I will not be false to David.

36 His seed shall be for ever,
And his throne as the sun before me,
37 As the moon shall he be established for ever,
And the witness in the sky is true. Selah.

38 But Thou, Thou hast cast off and rejected,
Thou hast been wroth with Thine anointed,
39 Thou hast abhorred the covenant of Thy servant,
Thou hast profaned his crown to the ground.

40 Thou hast broken down all his fences,
Thou hast made his strongholds a ruin.
41 All that pass on the way spoil him,
He is become a reproach to his neighbours.

42 Thou hast exalted the hand of his adversaries,
Thou hast made all his enemies rejoice.
43 Also Thou turnest the edge of his sword,
And hast not made him to stand in the battle.

44 Thou hast made an end of his lustre,
And cast his throne to the ground,
45 Thou hast shortened the days of his youth,
Thou hast wrapped shame upon him. Selah.

46 How long, Jehovah, wilt Thou hide Thyself for ever?
[How long] shall Thy wrath burn like fire?
47 Remember how short a time I [have to live],
For what vanity hast Thou created all the sons of men!
48 Who is the man who shall live and not see death,
[Who] shall deliver his soul from the hand of Sheol?

49 Where are Thy former loving-kindnesses, Jehovah,
Which Thou swarest to David in Thy faithfulness?
50 Remember, Lord, the reproach of Thy servants,
How I bear in my bosom the shame of the peoples (?)

51 Wherewith Thine enemies have reproached Thee, Jehovah,
Wherewith they have reproached the footsteps of Thine anointed.

52 Blessed be Jehovah for evermore.
Amen and Amen.

THE foundation of this psalm is the promise in 2 Sam. vii. which guaranteed the perpetuity of the Davidic kingdom. Many of the characteristic phrases of the prophecy recur here—*e.g.*, the promises that the children of wickedness shall not afflict, and that the transgressions of David's descendants should be followed by chastisement only, not by rejection. The contents of Nathan's oracle are first given in brief in vv. 3, 4—"like a text," as Hupfeld says—and again in detail and with poetic embellishments in vv. 19–37. But these glorious promises are set in sharpest contrast with a doleful present, which seems to contradict them. They not only embitter it, but they bewilder faith, and the psalmist's lament is made almost a reproach of God, whose faithfulness seems imperilled by the disasters which had fallen on the monarchy and on Israel. The complaint and petitions of the latter part are the true burden of the psalm, to which the celebration of Divine attributes in vv. 1–18, and the expansion of the fundamental promise in vv. 19–37, are meant to lead up. The attributes specified are those of Faithfulness (vv. 1, 2, 5, 8, 14) and of Power, which render the fulfilment of God's promises certain. By such contemplations the psalmist would fortify himself against the whispers of doubt, which were beginning to make themselves heard in his mind, and would find in the character of God both assurance that His promise shall not fail, and a powerful plea for his prayer that it may not fail.

The whole tone of the psalm suggests that it was written when the kingdom was toppling to ruin, or perhaps even after its fall. Delitzsch improbably supposes that the young king, whom loss and shame make an old man (ver. 45), is Rehoboam, and that the disasters which gave occasion to the psalm were those inflicted by the Egyptian king Shishak. Others see in that youthful prince Jehoiachin. who reigned for three months, and was then deposed by Nebuchadnezzar, and whom Jeremiah has bewailed (xxii. 24–29). But all such conjectures are precarious.

The structure of the psalm can scarcely be called strophical. There are three well-marked turns in the flow of thought,—first, the hymn to the Divine attributes (vv. 1–18); second, the expansion of the promise, which is the basis of the monarchy (vv. 19–37); and, finally, the lament and prayer, in view of present afflictions, that God would be true to His attributes and promises (vv. 38–51). For the most part the verses are grouped in pairs, which are occasionally lengthened into triplets.

The psalmist begins with announcing the theme of his song—the Loving-kindness and Faithfulness of God. Surrounded by disasters, which seem in violent contradiction to God's promise to David, he falls back on thoughts of the Mercy which gave it and the Faithfulness which will surely accomplish it. The resolve to celebrate these in such circumstances argues a faith victorious over doubts, and putting forth energetic efforts to maintain itself. This bird can sing in midwinter. True, the song has other notes than joyous ones, but they, too, extol God's Loving-kindness and Faithfulness, even while they seem to question them.

Self-command, which insists on a man's averting his thoughts from a gloomy outward present to gaze on God's loving purpose and unalterable veracity, is no small part of practical religion. The psalmist will *sing*, because he *said* that these two attributes were ever in operation, and lasting as the heavens. "Loving-kindness shall be built up for ever," its various manifestations being conceived as each being a stone in the stately building which is in continual course of progress through all ages, and can never be completed, since fresh stones will continually be laid, as long as God lives and pours forth His blessings. Much less can it ever fall into ruin, as impatient sense would persuade the psalmist that it is doing in his day. The parallel declaration as to God's Faithfulness takes the heavens as the type of duration and immobility, and conceives that attribute to be eternal and fixed, as they are. These convictions could not burn in the psalmist's heart without forcing him to speak. Lover, poet, and devout man, in their several ways, feel the same necessity of utterance. Not every Christian can "sing," but all can and should speak. They will, if their faith is strong.

The Divine promise, on which the Davidic throne rests, is summed up in the abruptly introduced pair of verses (3, 4). That promise is the second theme of the psalm; and just as, in some great musical composition, the overture sounds for the first time phrases which are to be recurrent and elaborated in the sequel, so, in the four first verses of the psalm, its ruling thoughts are briefly put. Vv. 1, 2, stand first, but are second in time to vv. 3, 4. God's oracle preceded the singer's praise. The language of these two verses echoes the original passage in 2 Sam. vii., as in

"*David My servant, establish, for ever, build,*" the last three of which expressions were used in ver. 2, with a view to their recurrence in ver. 4. The music keeps before the mind the perpetual duration of David's throne.

In vv. 6–18 the psalmist sets forth the Power and Faithfulness of God, which insure the fulfilment of His promises. He is the incomparably great and terrible God, who subdues the mightiest forces of nature and tames the proudest nations (vv. 9, 10), who is Maker and Lord of the world (vv. 11, 12), who rules with power, but also with righteousness, faithfulness, and grace (vv. 13, 14), and who, therefore, makes His people blessed and safe (vv. 15–18). Since God is such a God, His promise cannot remain unfulfilled. Power and willingness to execute it to the last tittle are witnessed by heaven and earth, by history and experience. Dark as the present may be, it would, therefore, be folly to doubt for a moment.

The psalmist begins his contemplations of the glory of the Divine nature with figuring the very heavens as vocal with His praise. Not only the object but the givers of that praise are noteworthy. The heavens are personified, as in Psalm xix.; and from their silent depths comes music. There is One higher, mightier, older, more unperturbed, pure, and enduring than they, whom they extol by their lustre which they owe to Him. They praise God's "wonder" (which here means, not so much His marvellous acts, as the wonderfulness of His Being, His incomparable greatness and power), and His Faithfulness, the two guarantees of the fulfilment of His promises. Nor are the visible heavens His only praisers. The holy ones, sons of the mighty—*i.e.*, the angels—bow before Him

who is high above their holiness and might, and own Him for God alone.

With ver. 9 the hymn descends to earth, and magnifies God's Power and Faithfulness as manifested there. The sea is, as always, the emblem of rebellious tumult. Its insolence is calmed by Him. And the proudest of the nations, such as Rahab ("Pride," a current name for Egypt), had cause to own His power, when He brought the waves of the sea over her hosts, thus in one act exemplifying His sovereign sway over both nature and nations. He is Maker, and therefore Lord, of heaven and earth. In all quarters of the world His creative hand is manifest, and His praise sounds. Tabor and Hermon may stand, as the parallelism requires, for west and east, though some suppose that they are simply named as conspicuous summits. They "shout for joy at Thy Name," an expression like that used in ver. 16, in reference to Israel. The poet thinks of the softly swelling Tabor with its verdure, and of the lofty Hermon with its snows, as sharing in that gladness, and praising Him to whom they owe their beauty and majesty. Creation vibrates with the same emotions which thrill the poet. The sum of all the preceding is gathered up in ver. 13, which magnifies the might of God's arm.

But more blessed still for the psalmist, in the midst of national gloom, is the other thought of the moral character of God's rule. His throne is broad-based upon the sure foundation of righteousness and justice. The pair of attributes always closely connected—namely, Loving-kindness and Troth or Faithfulness—are here, as frequently, personified. They "go to meet Thy face"—that is, in order to present themselves before Him. "The two genii of the history of redemp-

tion (Psalm xliii. 3) stand before His countenance, like attendant maidens, waiting the slightest indication of His will" (Delitzsch).

Since God is such a God, His Israel is blessed, whatever its present plight. So the psalmist closes the first part of his song, with rapturous celebration of the favoured nation's prerogatives. "The festal shout" or "the trumpet-blast" is probably the music at the festivals (Numb. xxiii. 21 and xxxi. 6), and "those who know" it means "those who are familiar with the worship of this great God." The elements of their blessedness are then unfolded. "They walk in the light of Thy face." Their outward life is passed in continual happy consciousness of the Divine presence, which becomes to them a source of gladness and guidance. "In Thy Name do they exult all the day." God's self-manifestation, and the knowledge of Him which arises therefrom, become the occasion of a calm, perpetual joy, which is secure from change, because its roots go deeper than the region where change works. "In Thy righteousness shall they be exalted." Through God's strict adherence to His covenant, not by any power of their own, shall they be lifted above foes and fears. "The glory of their strength art Thou." In themselves they are weak, but Thou, not any arm of flesh, art their strength, and by possession of Thee they are not only clothed with might, but resplendent with beauty. Human power is often unlovely; God-given strength is, like armour inlaid with gold, ornament as well as defence. "In Thy favour our horn shall be exalted." The psalmist identifies himself at last with the people, whose blessedness he has so glowingly celebrated. He could keep up the appearance of distinction no longer. "They"

gives place to "we" unconsciously, as his heart swells with the joy which he paints. Depressed as he and his people are for the moment, he is sure that there is lifting up. The emblem of the lifted horn is common, as expressive of victory. The psalmist is confident of Israel's triumph, because he is certain that the nation, as represented by and, as it were, concentrated in its king, belongs to God, who will not lose what is His. The rendering of ver. 18 in the A.V. cannot be sustained. "Our shield" in the first clause is parallel with "our king" in the second, and the meaning of both clauses is that the king of Israel is God's, and therefore secure. That ownership rests on the promise to David, and on it in turn is rested the psalmist's confidence that Israel and its king are possessed of a charmed life, and shall be exalted, however now abject and despondent.

The second part (vv. 19–37) draws out in detail, and at some points with heightened colouring, the fundamental prophecy by Nathan. It falls into two parts, of which the former (vv. 19–27) refers more especially to the promises given to David, and the second (vv. 28–37) to those relating to his descendants. In ver. 19 "vision" is quoted from 2 Sam. vii. 17; "then" points back to the period of giving the promise; "Thy favoured one" is possibly Nathan, but more probably David. The Masoretic reading, however, which is followed by many ancient versions, has the plural "favoured ones," which Delitzsch takes to mean Samuel and Nathan. "Help" means the help which, through the king, comes to his people, and especially, as appears from the use of the word "hero," aid in battle. But since the selection of David for the throne is the subject in hand, the emendation which reads for "help" *crown*

recommends itself as probable. David's prowess, his humble origin, and his devotion to God's service are brought into view in vv. 19, 20, as explaining and magnifying the Divine choice. His dignity is all from God. Consequently, as the next pair of verses goes on to say, God's protecting hand will ever be with him, since He cannot set a man in any position and fail to supply the gifts needed for it. Whom He chooses He will protect. Sheltered behind that strong hand, the king will be safe from all assaults. The word rendered "steal upon" in ver. 22 is doubtful, and by some is taken to mean *to exact*, as a creditor does, but that gives a flat and incongruous turn to the promise. For ver. 22 *b* compare 2 Sam. vii. 10. Victory over all enemies is next promised in vv. 23–25, and is traced to the perpetual presence with the king of God's Faithfulness and Loving-kindness, the two attributes of which so much has been sung in the former part. The manifestation of God's character (*i.e.*, His Name) will secure the exaltation of David's horn—*i.e.*, the victorious exercise of his God-given strength. Therefore a wide extension of his kingdom is promised in ver. 25, from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates and its canals, on which God will lay the king's hand —*i.e.*, will put them in his possession.

The next pair of verses (26, 27) deals with the inward side of the relations of God and the king. On David's part there will be child-like love, with all the lowliness of trust and obedience which lies in the recognition of God's fatherhood, and on God's part there will be the acknowledgment of the relation, and the adoption of the king as His "first-born," and therefore, in a special sense, beloved and exalted. Israel is called by the same name in other places, in reference

to its special prerogative amongst the nations. The national dignity is concentrated in the king, who stands to other monarchs as Israel to other nations, and is to them "Most High," the august Divine title, which here may possibly mean that David is to the rulers of the earth an image of God. The reciprocal relation of Father and Son is not here conceived in its full inwardness and depth as Christianity knows it, for it has reference to office rather than to the person sustaining the office, but it is approximating thereto. There is an echo of the fundamental passage in ver. 26. (Compare 2 Sam. vii. 14.)

From ver. 28 onwards the psalmist turns to expand the promises to David's line. His words are mainly a poetical paraphrase of 2 Sam. vii. 14. Transgression shall indeed be visited with chastisement, which the fatherly relation requires, as the original passage indicates by the juxtaposition of the promise "I will be his Father," and the declaration "I will chasten him." But it will be chastisement only, and not rejection. The unchangeableness of God's loving purpose is very strongly and beautifully put in ver. 33, in which the twin attributes of Loving-kindness and Faithfulness are again blended as the ground of sinful men's hope. The word rendered above "break off" occasions a difficulty, both in regard to its form and its appropriateness in this connection. The clause is a quotation from 2 Sam. vii. 15, and the emendation which substitutes for *break off* the more natural word used there—namely, *withdraw*—is to be preferred. In ver. 33 *b* the paradoxical expression of *being false to My faithfulness* suggests the contradiction inherent in the very thought that He can break His plighted word. The same idea is again put in striking form in ver. 34: "I will not profane My

covenant," even though degenerate sons of David "profane" God's statute. His word, once spoken, is inviolable. He is bound by His oath. He has given His holiness as the pledge of His word, and, till that holiness wanes, those utterances which He has sealed with it cannot be recalled. The certainty that sin does not alter God's promise is not traced here to His placableness, but to His immutable nature, and to the obligations under which He is laid by His own word and acts. That unchangeableness is a rock-foundation, on which sinful men may build their certitude. It is much to know that they cannot sin away God's mercy nor exhaust His gentle long-suffering. It is even more to know that His holiness guarantees that they cannot sin away His promises, nor by any breach of His commandments provoke Him to break His covenant.

The allusions to the ancient promise are completed in vv. 36, 37, with the thought of the perpetual continuance of the Davidic line and kingdom, expressed by the familiar comparison of its duration to that of the sun and moon. Ver. 37 *b* is best understood as above. Some take the faithful witness to be the moon; others the rainbow, and render, as in the A.V. and R.V., "and as the faithful witness." But the designation of the moon as a witness is unexampled and almost unintelligible. It is better to take the clause as independent, and to suppose that Jehovah is His own witness, and that the psalmist here speaks in his own person, the quotation of the promises being ended. Cheyne encloses the clause in a parenthesis and compares Rev. iii. 14.

The third part begins with ver. 38, and consists of two portions, in the first of which the psalmist complains with extraordinary boldness of remonstrance,

and describes the contrast between these lofty promises and the sad reality (vv. 38–45), and, in the second, prays for the removal of the contradiction of God's promise by Israel's affliction, and bases this petition on the double ground of the shortness of life, and the dishonour done to His own Name thereby.

The expostulation very nearly crosses the boundary of reverent remonstrance, when it charges God with having Himself "abhorred" or, according to another rendering, "made void" His covenant, and cast the king's crown to the ground. The devastation of the kingdom is described, in vv. 40, 41, in language borrowed from Psalm lxxx. 12. The pronouns grammatically refer to the king, but the ideas of the land and the monarch are blended. The next pair of verses (42, 43) ventures still further in remonstrance, by charging God with taking the side of Israel's enemies and actively intervening to procure its defeat. The last verse-pair of this part (44, 45) speaks more exclusively of the king, or perhaps of the monarchy. The language, especially in ver. 45 *a*, seems most naturally understood of an individual. Delitzsch takes such to be its application, and supposes it to describe the king as having been prematurely aged by calamity; while Hupfeld, with Hengstenberg and others, prefer to regard the expression as lamenting that the early days of the monarchy's vigour had so soon been succeeded by decrepitude like that of age. That family, which had been promised perpetual duration and dominion, has lost its lustre, and is like a dying lamp. That throne has fallen to the ground, which God had promised should stand for ever. Senile weakness has stricken the monarchy, and disaster, which makes it an object of contempt, wraps it like a garment, instead of the

royal robe. A long, sad wail of the music fixes the picture on the mind of the hearer.

Then follows prayer, which shows how consistent with true reverence and humble dependence is the outspoken vigour of the preceding remonstrance. The boldest thoughts about the apparent contradiction of God's words and deeds are not too bold, if spoken straight to Him, and not muttered against Him, and if they lead the speaker to prayer for the removal of the anomaly. In ver. 46 there is a quotation from Psalm lxxix. 5. The question "How long" is the more imploring because life is so short. There is but a little while during which it is possible for God to manifest Himself as full of Loving-kindness and Faithfulness. The psalmist lets his feelings of longing to see for himself the manifestation of these attributes peep forth for a moment, in that pathetic sudden emergence of "I" instead of "we" or "men," in ver. 47*a*. His language is somewhat obscure, but the sense is clear. Literally, the words read "Remember—I, what a transitoriness." The meaning is plain enough, when it is observed that, as Perowne rightly says, "I" is placed first for the sake of emphasis. It is a tender thought that God may be moved to show forth His Loving-kindness by remembrance of the brief period within which a man's opportunity of beholding it is restricted, and by the consideration that so soon he will have to look on a grimmer sight, and "see death." The music again comes in with a melancholy cadence, emphasising the sadness which enwraps man's short life, if no gleams of God's loving-kindness fall on its fleeting days.

The last three verses (vv. 49–51) urge yet another plea—that of the dishonour accruing to God from the continuance of Israel's disasters. A second "Remember"

presents that plea, which is preceded by the wistful question "Where are Thy former loving-kindnesses?" The psalmist looks back on the glories of early days, and the retrospect is bitter and bewildering. That these were sworn to David in God's faithfulness staggers him, but he makes the fact a plea with God. Then in vv. 50, 51, he urges the insults and reproaches which enemies hurled against him and against "Thy servants," and therefore against God.

Ver. 50*b* is obscure. To "bear in the bosom" usually implies tender care, but here can only mean sympathetic participation. The psalmist again lets his own personality appear for a moment, while he identifies himself as a member of the nation with "Thy servants" and "Thine anointed." The last words of the clause are so obscure that there must apparently have been textual corruption. If the existing text is retained, the object of the verb *I bear* must be supplied from *a*, and this clause will run, "I bear in my bosom the reproach of all the many peoples." But the collocation of *all* and *many* is harsh, and the position of *many* is anomalous. An ingenious conjecture, adopted by Cheyne from Böttcher and Bickell, and accepted by Baethgen, reads for "all, many peoples," *the shame of the peoples*, which gives a good meaning, and may be received as at all events probable, and expressing the intent of the psalmist. Insolent conquerors and their armies triumph over the fallen Israel, and "reproach the footsteps" of the dethroned king or royal line—*i.e.*, they pursue him with their taunts, wherever he goes. These reproaches cut deep into the singer's heart; but they glance off from the earthly objects and strike the majesty of Heaven. God's people cannot be flouted without His honour being touched. Therefore

the prayer goes up, that the Lord would remember these jeers which mocked Him as well as His afflicted people, and would arise to action on behalf of His own Name. His Loving-kindness and Faithfulness, which the psalmist has magnified, and on which he rests his hopes, are darkened in the eyes of men and even of His own nation by the calamities, which give point to the rude gibes of the enemy. Therefore the closing petitions beseech God to think on these reproaches, and to bring into act once more His Loving-kindness, and to vindicate His Faithfulness, which He had sealed to David by His oath.

Ver. 52 is no part of the original psalm, but is the closing doxology of Book III.

FAMILY OF FAITH COLLEGE LIBRARY
Expositor's Bible Psalms 1-89.
B5491.E9 vol.15
3480400005755